A

Robert Sedgeley

TOUR

THROUGH

SICILY AND MALTA,

3688.

IN A

SERIES OF LETTERS

TO

WILLIAM BECKFORD, Esq.

OF SOMERLY IN SUFFOLK;

FROM

P. BRYDONE, F. R. S.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

A NEW EDITION.

EMBELLISHED WITH ELEGANT ENGRAVINGS FROM ORIGINAL DRAWINGS.

VOL. I.

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M,DCC,XCIX.

ADVERTISEMENT.

HAD there been any book in our language on the ſubject of the following Letters, they never ſhould have ſeen the light. The Author wrote them for the amuſement of his friends, and as an aſſiſtance to his memory; and if it will in any degree apologize for their imperfections, he can with truth declare that they never were intended for publication: nor indeed was that idea ſuggeſted to him, till long after they were written. One principal motive he will own, was the deſire of giving to the world, and perhaps of tranſmitting to poſterity, a monument of his friendſhip with the gentleman to whom they are addreſſed.

When

When Mr Forſter's tranſlation of Baron Riedeſel's book firſt appeared, theſe Letters were already in the preſs, and the author apprehended an anticipation of his ſubject; however, on peruſal he had the ſatisfaction to find, that the two works did not much interfere.

In tranſcribing them for the preſs, he found it neceſſary both to retrench and to amplify; by which the eaſe of the epiſtolary ſtyle has probably ſuffered, and ſome of the letters have been extended much beyond their original length.

He now preſents them to the Public with the greateſt diffidence; hoping that ſome allowance will be made for the very inconvenient circumſtances, little favourable to order or preciſion, in which many of them were written: But he would not venture to new-model them; apprehending, that what they might gain in form and expreſſion, they would probably loſe in eaſe and ſimplicity; and well knowing that the original impreſſions are better deſcribed at the moment they are felt, than from the moſt exact recollection.

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A TOUR

[redacted]

A

TOUR

THROUGH

SICILY AND MALTA.

LETTER I.

Naples, May 14, 1770.

DEAR BECKFORD,

I REMEMBER to have heard you regret, that in all your peregrinations through Europe, you had ever neglected the iſland of Sicily; and had ſpent much of your time in running over the old beaten track, and in examining the thread-bare ſubjects of Italy and France; when probably there were a variety of objects not leſs intereſting, that ſtill lay buried in oblivion in that celebrated iſland. We intend to profit from this hint of yours.—Fullarton has been urging me to it with all that ardour, which a new proſpect of acquiring knowledge ever inſpires in him; and Glover, your old acquaintance, has promiſed to accompany us.

The Italians repreſent it as impoſſible: as there are no inns in the iſland, and many of the roads are over dangerous precipices, or through bogs, and foreſts, infeſted with the moſt reſo-

...ute and daring banditti in Europe. However, all these considerations, formidable as they may appear, did not deter Mr Hamilton*, his lady, and Lord Fortrose†.. They made this expedition last summer; and returned so much delighted with it, that they have animated us with the strongest desire of enjoying the same pleasure.

Our first plan, was to go by land to Regium, and from thence, cross over to Messina; but on making exact enquiry, with regard to the state of the country, and method of travelling, we find that the danger from the banditti in Calabria and Apulia is so great, the accommodations so wretched, and inconveniences of every kind so numerous, without any consideration whatever to throw into the opposite scale, that we soon relinquished that scheme; and in spite of all the terrors of Scylla and Charybdis, and the more real terrors of sea sickness (the most formidable monster of the three) we have determined to go by water; And, that no time may be lost, we have already taken our passage on board an English ship, which is ready to sail with the first fair wind.

Now, as this little expedition has never been considered as any part of this grand tour; and as it will probably present many objects worthy of your attention, not mentioned in any of our books of travels; I flatter myself that a short account of these will not be unacceptable to you; and may in some degree make up for your having neglected to visit them. You may therefore expect to hear of me, from every town where

* Now knight of the bath. † Now Earl of Seaforth.

where we ſtop; and when I meet with any deſerving of notice, I ſhall attempt to deſcribe it in as few words as poſſible. We have been waiting with impatience for a fair wind, but at preſent there is little proſpect of it. The weather is exceedingly rough, and not a ſhip has been able to get out of the harbour for upwards of three weeks paſt. This climate is by no means what we expected to find it; and the ſerene ſky of Italy, ſo much boaſted of by our travelled gentlemen, does not altogether deſerve the great eulogiums beſtowed upon it. It is now the middle of May, and we have not as yet had any continuance of what may be called fine weather. It has, indeed, been abundantly warm, but ſeldom a day has paſſed without ſudden ſtorms wind and rain, which render walking out here to the full as dangerous to our invalids, as it is in England.

I am perſuaded that our phyſicians are under ſome miſtake with regard to this climate. It is certainly one of the warmeſt in Italy; but it is as certainly one of the moſt inconſtant; and from what we have obſerved, diſagrees with the greateſt part of our valetudinarians; but more particularly with the gouty people, who have all found themſelves better at Rome; which, though much colder in winter, is, I believe, a healthier climate. Naples to be ſure is more eligible in ſummer, as the air is conſtantly refreſhed by the ſea breeze, when Rome is often ſcorched by the moſt inſupportable heat. Laſt ſummer, Farenheit's thermometer never roſe higher at Naples than 76. At Rome it was 89.

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The difference is often ſtill more conſiderable. In winter it is not leſs remarkable. Here, our greateſt degree of cold was in the end of January; the thermometer ſtood at 36; at Rome it fell to 27; ſo that the diſtance between the two extremes of heat and cold laſt year at Naples, was only 40 degrees; whereas at Rome it was no leſs than 62. Yet, by all accounts, their winter was much more agreeable and healthy than ours: For they had clear froſty weather whilſt we were deluged with rains, accompanied with very high wind. The people here aſſure us, that in ſome ſeaſons it has rained every day for ſix or ſeven weeks. But the moſt diſagreeable part of the Neapolitan climate is the ſirocc or ſouth eaſt wind, which is very common at this ſeaſon. It is infinitely more relaxing, and gives the vapours in a much higher degree, than the worſt of our rainy Novembers. It has now blown for theſe ſeven days without intermiſſion; and has indeed blown away all our gaiety and ſpirits; and if it continues much longer, I do not know what may be the conſequence. It gives a degree of laſſitude, both to the body and mind, that renders them abſolutely incapable of performing their uſual functions. It is not perhaps ſurpriſing, that it ſhould produce theſe effects on a phlegmatic Engliſh conſtitution; but we have juſt now an inſtance, that all the mercury of France muſt ſink under the load of this horrid, leaden atmoſphere. A ſmart Pariſian marquis came here about ten days ago: he was ſo full of animal ſpirits that the people thought him mad. He never remained

mained a moment in the ſame place; but, at their grave converſations, uſed to ſkip from room to room with ſuch amazing elaſticity, that the Italians ſwore that he had got ſprings in his ſhoes. I met him this morning, walking with the ſtep of a philoſopher; a ſmelling bottle in his hand, and all his vivacity extinguiſhed. I aſked him what was the matter? "Ah! mon ami," ſaid he, "je m'ennui a la mort;—moi, qui n'ai jamais ſcu l'ennui. Mais cet execrable vent m'accable: et deux jours de plus, et je me pend."

The natives themſelves do not ſuffer leſs than ſtrangers; and all nature ſeems to languiſh during this abominable wind. A Neapolitan lover avoids his miſtreſs with the utmoſt care in the time of the ſirocc, and the indolence it inſpires, is almoſt ſufficient to extinguiſh every paſſion. All works of genius are laid aſide during its continuance; and when any thing very flat or inſipid is produced, the ſtrongeſt phraſe of diſapprobation they can beſtow is, "Era ſcritto in tempo dell ſirocco;" that it was writ in the time of the ſirocc. I ſhall make no apology for this letter; and whenever I happen to tire you, be kind enough to remember (pray do) that it is not me you are to blame, but the ſirocc wind. This will put me much at my eaſe, and will ſave us a world of time in apologies.

I have been endeavouring to get ſome account of the cauſe of this very ſingular quality of the ſirocc; but the people here ſeldom think of accounting for any thing, and I do not find, notwithſtanding its remarkable effects, that it

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has ever yet been an object of enquiry amongſt them.

I have not obſerved that the ſirocc makes any remarkable change in the barometer. When it firſt ſet in, the mercury fell about a line and a half; and has continued much about the ſame height ever ſince; but the thermometer was at 43 the morning it began, and roſe almoſt immediately to 65; and for theſe two days paſt it has been at 70 and 71. However, it is certainly not the warmth of this wind, that renders it ſo oppreſſive to the ſpirits; it is rather the want of that genial quality, which is ſo enlivening; and which even renders the weſtern breeze ſo agreeable: The ſpring and elaſticity of the air ſeems to be loſt; and that active principle which animates all nature, appears to be dead. This principle we have ſometimes ſuppoſed to be nothing elſe than the ſubtle electric fluid that the air uſually contains; and indeed, we have found, that during this wind, it appears to be almoſt annihilated, or at leaſt, its activity exceedingly reduced. Yeſterday, and to-day, we have been attempting to make ſome electrical experiments; but I never before found the air ſo unfavourable for them.

Sea-bathing we have found to be the beſt antidote againſt the effects of the ſirocc; and this we certainly enjoy in great perfection. Lord Fortroſe, who is the ſoul of our colony here, has provided a large commodious boat for this purpoſe. We meet every morning at 8 o'clock, and row about half a mile out to ſea, where we ſtrip and plunge into the water: Were it not

for

for this, we ſhould all of us have been as bad as the French marquis. My lord has ten watermen, who are in reality a ſort of amphibious animals, as they live one half of the ſummer in the ſea. Three or four of theſe generally go in with us, to pick up ſtragglers, and ſecure us from all accidents. They dive with eaſe to the depth of forty, and ſometimes of fifty feet, and bring up quantities of excellent ſhell-fiſh during the ſummer-months; but ſo great is their devotion, that every time they go down they make the ſign of the croſs, and mutter an Ave Maria, without which they ſhould certainly be drowned; and were not a little ſcandalized at us for omitting this ceremony. To accuſtom us to ſwimming in all circumſtances, my lord has provided a ſuit of clothes, which we wear by turns; and from a very ſhort practice, we have found it almoſt as commodious to ſwim with as without them: we have likewiſe learned to ſtrip in the water, and find it no very difficult matter: And I am fully perſuaded, from being accuſtomed to this kind of exerciſe, that in caſe of ſhipwreck we ſhould have greatly the advantage over thoſe who had never practiſed it; for it is by the embarraſſment from the clothes, and the agitation that people are thrown into, from finding themſelves in a ſituation they had never experienced before, that ſo many lives are loſt in the water.

After bathing, we have an Engliſh breakfaſt at his lordſhip's; and after breakfaſt, a delightful little concert, which laſts for an hour and a half. Barbella, the ſweeteſt fiddle in Italy, leads

our little band. This party, I think, conftitutes one principal part of the pleafure we enjoy at Naples. We have likewife fome very agreeable fociety amongft ourfelves, though we cannot boaft much of that with the inhabitants. There are to be fure many good people among them; but in general, there is fo very little analogy betwixt an Englifh and a Neapolitan mind, that the true focial harmony, that great fweetener of human life, can feldom be produced. In lieu of this, (the exchange you will fay is but a bad one) the country round Naples abounds fo much in every thing that is curious; both in art and nature, and affords fo ample a field of fpeculation for the naturalift and antiquary, that a perfon of any curiofity may fpend fome months here very agreeably, and not without profit.

Befides the difcoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeia, which, of themfelves, afford a great fund of entertainment, the whole coaft that furrounds this beautiful bay, particularly that near Puzzoli, Cuma, Micenum and Baia, is covered with innumerable monuments of Roman magnificence. But, alas! how are the mighty fallen! This delightful coaft, once the garden of all Italy, and inhabited only by the rich, the gay, and luxurious, is now abandoned to the pooreft and moft miferable of mortals. Perhaps, there is no fpot on the globe that has undergone fo thorough a change; or that can exhibit fo ftriking a picture of the vanity of human grandeur. Thofe very walls that once lodged a Cæfar, a Lucullus, an Anthony, the richeft

richeſt and moſt voluptuous of mankind; are now occupied by the very meaneſt and moſt indigent wretches on earth, who are actually ſtarving for want in thoſe very apartments, that were the ſcenes of the greateſt luxury. There we are told that ſuppers were frequently given, that coſt fifty thouſand pounds; and ſome that even amounted to double that ſum.

The luxury indeed of Baia was ſo great, that it became a proverb, even amongſt the luxurious Romans themſelves; and, at Rome, we often find them upbraiding with effeminacy and epicuriſm, thoſe who ſpent much of their time in this ſcene of delights; Clodius throws it in Cicero's teeth more than once: And that orator's having purchaſed a villa here, hurt him not a little in the opinion of the graver and more auſtere part of the ſenate. The walls of theſe palaces ſtill remain, and the poor peaſants, in ſome places, have built up their miſerable huts within them; but, at preſent, there is not one gentleman or man of faſhion reſiding in any part of this country; the former ſtate of which, compared with the preſent, certainly makes the moſt ſtriking contraſt imaginable. Yeſterday, we rode over the greateſt part of it a-ſhooting porcupine, a new ſpecies of diverſion, which I had never heard of before. We killed ſeveral of theſe animals on the Monte Barbaro, the place that formerly produced the Falernian wine, but now a barren waſte. I don't know if you are acquainted with this kind of ſport. To me, I own, its novelty was its greateſt merit; and I would not at any time give a day of

partridge

partridge for a month of porcupine ſhooting. Neither indeed is the fleſh of theſe animals the moſt delicious in the world, though to-day moſt of us have dined upon it. It is extremely luſcious, and ſoon palls upon the appetite.

We are now going to lay in our ſea-ſtore, as there is ſome probability that we ſhall ſail in a day or two.——Farewel—you ſhall hear from me again at Meſſina, if we are not ſwallowed up by Charybdis.

LETTER II.

On Board the Charming Molly, off the Iſland of Capre, May 15.

WE have now begun our expedition with every auſpicious omen. This morning the melancholy ſirocc left us; and in place of it we have gotten a fine briſk tramontane (or North wind) which in a few hours blew away all our vapours, and made us wonder how much the happineſs of mankind depends on a blaſt of wind. After eating a hearty dinner with many of our friends at Mr Walter's, and drinking plentifully of his excellent burgundy, we took leave in the higheſt ſpirits. Had the ſirocc blown as yeſterday, we ſhould probably have been in tears; and not one of us would have ſuſpected that we were crying, only becauſe the wind was in the ſouth. We are not apt to ſuppoſe it; but probably a great part of our pleaſures and pains depend upon ſuch trivial cauſes,

though

though always aſcribed to ſomething elſe; few people being willing to own themſelves like a weathercock, affected by every blaſt. Indeed we ſhould have naturally imputed it to the grief of parting with that excellent family whom you know ſo well; which no perſon could ever leave without regret, or ſee without pleaſure; but the agreeable proſpect of ſoon meeting again (probably better qualified to amuſe and entertain them) abſorbed all melancholy thoughts; and even added to that alacrity, which the delightful tour before us had already inſpired.

We ſailed at five; and after firing our farewel ſignals to our friends on ſhore (whom we diſcovered with our glaſſes at ſome miles diſtance), we ſoon found ourſelves in the middle of the bay of Naples, ſurrounded by the moſt beautiful ſcenery in the world. It fell calm for an hour, on purpoſe to give us time to contemplate all its beauties.

The bay is of a circular figure; in moſt places upwards of 20 miles in diameter; ſo that, including all its breaks and inequalities, the circumference is conſiderably more than 60 miles. The whole of this ſpace is ſo wonderfully diverſified, by all the riches both of art and nature, that there is ſcarce an object wanting to render the ſcene complete; and it is hard to ſay, whether the view is more pleaſing from the ſingularity of many of theſe objects, or from the incredible variety of the whole. You ſee an amazing mixture of the ancient and modern; ſome riſing to fame, and ſome ſinking to ruin. Palaces reared over the tops of other palaces, and ancient

ancient magnificence trampled under foot—by modern folly.—Mountains and iſlands, that were celebrated for their fertility, changed into barren waſtes, and barren waſtes into fertile fields and rich vineyards. Mountains ſunk into plains, and plains ſwelled into mountains. Lakes drunk up by volcanoes, and extinguiſhed volcanoes turned into lakes. The earth ſtill ſmoking in many places; and in others throwing out flame.—In ſhort, Nature ſeems to have formed this coaſt in her moſt capricious mood; for every object is a *luſus naturæ.* She never ſeems to have gone ſeriouſly to work; but to have devoted this ſpot to the moſt unlimited indulgence of caprice and frolic.

The bay is ſhut out from the Mediterranean by the iſland of Capre, ſo famous for the abode of Auguſtus; and afterwards ſo infamous for that of Tiberius. A little to the weſt lie thoſe of Iſchia, Proſida, and Niſida; the celebrated promontory of Micæum, where Æneas landed; the claſſic fields of Baia, Cuma, and Puzzoli; with all the variety of ſcenery that formed both the Tartarus and Elyſium of the ancients; the Camphi Phlegrei, or burning plains where Jupiter overcame the giants; the Monte Novo, formed of late years by the fire; the Monte Barbaro; the pictureſque city of Puzzoli, with the Solfaterra ſmoking above it; the beautiful promontory of Pauſillippe, exhibiting the fineſt ſcenery that can be imagined; the great and opulent city of Naples with its three caſtles, its harbour full of ſhips from every nation, its palaces, churches, and convents innumerable. The

rich

rich country from thence to Portici, covered with noble houses and gardens, and appearing only a continuation of the city. The palace of the king, with many others surrounding it, all built over the roofs of those of Herculaneum, buried near a hundred feet, by the eruptions of Vesuvius. The black fields of lava that have run from that mountain, intermixed with gardens, vineyards, and orchards. Vesuvius itself, in the back ground of the scene, discharging volumes of fire and smoke, and forming a broad track in the air over our heads, extending without being broken or dissipated to the utmost verge of the horizon. A variety of beautiful towns and villages, round the base of the mountain, thoughtless of the impending ruin that daily threatens them. Some of these are reared over the very roofs of Pompeia and Stabia, where Pliny perished; and with their foundations have pierced through the sacred abodes of the ancient Romans; thousands of whom lie buried here, the victims of this inexorable mountain. Next follows the extensive and romantic coast of Castello Mare, Sorrentum, and Mola; diversified with every picturesque object in nature. It was the study of this wild and beautiful country that formed our greatest landscape-painters. This was the school of Poussin and Salvator Rosa, but more particularly of the last, who composed many of his most celebrated pieces from the bold craggy rocks that surround this coast; and no doubt it was from the daily contemplation of these romantic objects, that they stored their minds with that variety of ideas

ideas they have communicated to the world with ſuch elegance in their works.

Now, ſhould I tell you this extenſive coaſt, this prodigious variety of mountains, vallies, promontories and iſlands, covered with an everlaſting verdure, and loaded with the richeſt fruits, is all the produce of ſubterraneous fire; it would require, I am afraid, too great a ſtretch of faith to believe me; yet the fact is certain, and can only be doubted by thoſe who have wanted time or curioſity to examine it. It is ſtrange, you will ſay, that Nature ſhould make uſe of the ſame agent to create as to deſtroy; and that what has only been looked upon as the conſumer of countries, is in fact the very power that produces them. Indeed, this part of our earth ſeems already to have undergone the ſentence pronounced upon the whole of it; but, like the phœnix, has riſen again from its own aſhes, in much greater beauty and ſplendour than before it was conſumed. The traces of theſe dreadful conflagrations are ſtill conſpicuous in every corner; they have been violent in their operations, but in the end have proved ſalutary in their effects. The fire in many places is not extinguiſhed, but Veſuvius is now the only ſpot where it rages with any degree of activity.

Mr Hamilton, our miniſter here, who is no leſs diſtinguiſhed in the learned, than in the polite world, has lately examined it with a truly philoſophic eye, and this is the reſult of all his obſervations: however, at preſent I only ſit down to give you an account of the proſpect of this ſingular country, and not to write its natu-

ral hiſtory; which would lead me into too vaſt a field; I ſhall reſerve that curious ſubject till our return, when I ſhall have more leiſure to make you acquainted with it.——I beg therefore you would at leaſt ſuſpend your judgment for the preſent, and do not condemn me before I am heard.

After contemplating this delightful proſpect, till ſunſet, the wind ſprung up again, and we have now almoſt reached Capre, 30 miles diſtant from Naples. We have juſt ſpoken with an Engliſh ſhip. They tell us, that the Marquis of Carmarthen, Lord Fortroſe, and Mr Hamilton obſerving the calm, took a boat to make us a viſit; but unfortunately miſtaking their veſſel for ours, we have had the mortification to miſs them.

The night is very dark; and mount Veſuvius is flaming at a dreadful rate: We can obſerve the red-hot ſtones thrown to a vaſt height in the air; and, after their fall, rolling down the ſide of the mountain. Our ſhip is going ſo ſmooth, that we are ſcarce ſenſible of the motion; and if this wind continue, before to-morrow night we ſhall be in ſight of Sicily. Adieu. The captain is making a bowl of grog, and promiſing us a happy voyage.

16th. All wrong—Sick to death—Execrable ſirocc wind, and directly contrary—Vile heaving waves—A plague of all ſea voyages.—That author was ſurely right, who ſaid, that *land voyages** were much to be preferred.

17th in the morning. For theſe 24 hours

* See *Tour to the Eaſt.*

paſt we have been groaning to one another from our beds; execrating the waves, and wiſhing that we had rather been at the mercy of all the banditti of Calabria. We are now beginning to change our tune. The ſirocc is gone, and the wind is conſiderably fallen; however, we are ſtill three woful figures. Our ſervants too are ſick and as helpleſs as we. The captain ſays, that Philip, our Sicilian man, was frightened out of his wits; and has been praying to St Januarius with all his might. He now thinks he has heard him, and imputes the change of the weather entirely to his intereſt with his ſaint.

17th. Three o'clock. Weather pleaſant and favourable.—A fine breeze ſince ten;—have juſt come in ſight of Strombolo. Our pilot ſays it is near twenty leagues off. We have likewiſe a view of the mountains of Calabria, but at a very great diſtance. Ship ſteady; and ſea-ſickneſs almoſt gone.

Eleven at night. The weather is now fine, and we are all well. After ſpying Strombolo, by degrees we came in ſight of the reſt of the Lipari iſlands, and part of the coaſt of Sicily. Theſe iſlands are very pictureſque, and ſeveral of them ſtill emit ſmoke, particularly Volcano and Volcanello; but none of them, for ſome ages paſt, except Strombolo, have made any eruptions of fire. We are juſt now lying within about three miles of that curious iſland, and can ſee its operations diſtinctly. It appears to be a volcano of a very different nature from Veſuvius, the exploſions of which ſucceed one another with ſome degree of regularity, and have

no great variety of duration. Now I have been obſerving Strombolo, ever ſince it fell dark, with a good deal of pleaſure, but not without ſome degree of perplexity, as I cannot account for its variety. Sometimes its exploſions reſemble thoſe of Veſuvius, and the light ſeems only to be occaſioned by the quantity of fiery ſtones thrown into the air; and as ſoon as theſe have fallen down, it appears to be extinguiſhed, till another exploſion cauſes a freſh illumination: This I have always obſerved to be the caſe with Veſuvius; except when the lava has riſen to the ſummit of the mountain, and continued without variety to illuminate the air around it.— The light from Strombolo evidently depends on ſome other cauſe. Sometimes a clear red flame iſſues from the crater of the mountain, and continues to blaze without interruption, for near the ſpace of half an hour. The fire is of a different colour from the exploſions of ſtones, and is evidently produced from a different cauſe. It would ſeem as if ſome inflammable ſubſtance were ſuddenly kindled up in the bowels of the mountain. It is attended with no noiſe, nor exploſion that we are ſenſible of. It has now fallen calm, and we ſhall probably have an opportunity of examining this volcano more minutely to-morrow. We were told at Naples that it had lately made a violent eruption, and had begun to form a new iſland at ſome little diſtance from the old; which piece of intelligence was one of our great inducements to this expedition. We think we have diſcovered this iſland, as we have obſerved ſeveral times the appearance of a

 ſmall

ſmall flame ariſing out of the ſea, a little to the ſouth-weſt of Strombolo; and ſuppoſe it muſt have iſſued from this new iſland; but it is poſſible this light may came from the lower part of the iſland of Strombolo itſelf. We ſhall ſee to-morrow.

18th. We are ſtill off Strombolo, but unfortunately at preſent it intercepts the view of that ſpot from whence we obſerved the flame to ariſe, and we can ſee no appearance of any new iſland, nor indeed of any lava that has of late ſprung from the old one. We have a diſtinct view of the crater of Strombolo, which ſeems to be different from Veſuvius, and all the old volcanoes that ſurround Naples. Of theſe, the craters are without exception in the centre, and form the higheſt part of the mountain. That of Strombolo is on its ſide, and not within 200 yards of its ſummit. From the crater to the ſea, the iſland is entirely compoſed of the ſame ſort of aſhes and burnt matter as the conical part of Veſuvius: and the quantity of this matter is perpetually increaſing, from the uninterrupted diſcharge from the mountain; for of all the volcanoes we read of, Strombolo ſeems to be the only one that burns without ceaſing. Ætna and Veſuvius often lie quiet for many months, even years, without the leaſt appearance of fire, but Strombolo is ever at work, and for ages paſt has been looked upon as the great light-houſe of theſe ſeas.

It is truely wonderful, how ſuch a conſtant and immenſe fire is maintained for thouſands of years, in the midſt of the ocean! That of the other

other Lipari iſlands ſeems now almoſt extinct, and the force of the whole to be concentered in Strombolo, which acts as one great vent to them all. We ſtill obſerve Volcano and Volcanello throwing out volumes of ſmoke, but during the whole night we could not perceive the leaſt ſpark of fire from either of them.

It is probable, that Strombolo, as well as all the reſt of theſe iſlands, is originally the work of ſubterraneous fire. The matter of which they are compoſed, in a manner demonſtrates this; and many of the Sicilian authors confirm it. There are now eleven of them in all; and none of the ancients mention more than ſeven. Fazello, one of the beſt Sicilian authors, gives an account of the production of Volcano, now one of the moſt conſiderable of theſe iſlands. He ſays it happened in the early time of the republic, and is recorded by Euſebius, Pliny and others. He adds, that even in his time, in the beginning of the 16th century, it ſtill diſcharged quantities of fire and of pumice ſtones; but that in the preceding century, in the year 1444, on the 5th of February, there had been a very great eruption of this iſland, which ſhook all Sicily, and alarmed the coaſt of Italy as far as Naples. He ſays the ſea boiled all around the iſland, and rocks of a vaſt ſize were diſcharged from the crater; that fire and ſmoke in many places pierced through the waves, and that the navigation amongſt theſe iſlands was totally changed; rocks appearing where it was formerly deep water; and many of the ſtraits and ſhallows were entirely filled up. He obſerves, that

that Ariſtotle, in his book on meteors, takes notice of a very early eruption of this iſland, by which not only the coaſt of Sicily, but likewiſe many cities in Italy were covered with aſhes. It has probably been that very eruption which formed the iſland. He deſcribes Strombolo to have been, in his time, pretty much the ſame as at this day; only that it then produced a great quantity of cotton, which is not now the caſe. The greateſt part of it appears to be barren. On the north ſide there are a few vineyards; but they are very meagre: Oppoſite to theſe, there is a rock at ſome diſtance from land; it ſeems to be entirely of lava, and is not leſs than 50 or 60 feet above the water.

The whole iſland of Strombolo, is a mountain that riſes ſuddenly from the ſea; it is about ten miles round, and is not of the exact conical form, ſuppoſed common to all volcanoes. We were determined to have landed on the iſland, and to have attempted to examine the volcano; but our Sicilian pilot aſſures us, that the crater is not only inacceſſible (which indeed I own it appears to be) but that we ſhall likewiſe be obliged to perform a quarantine of 48 hours at Meſſina; and that beſides we ſhould run a great riſk of being attacked by the natives, who are little better than ſavages, and always on the alarm againſt the Turks.—On weighing theſe reaſons, and putting the queſtion, it was carried, To proceed on our voyage.

I own it is with much regret that I leave this curious iſland, without being better acquainted with it. I have been looking with a good glaſs

all round, but can ſee no marks of the eruption we heard ſo much of at Naples: indeed, the ſouth-weſt part, where we ſaw the appearance of fire, is ſtill hid from us by the interpoſition of the iſland; and if there has been an eruption, it was certainly on that ſide: It is probable we ſhall never be able to learn whether there has been one or not; or at leaſt to make ourſelves maſters of any of the particulars relating to it; for events of that kind do not make ſuch a noiſe in this ignorant and indolent country, as the blowing of an aloe, or a gooſe-berry buſh at Chriſtmas, does in England. Strombolo riſes to a great height: our pilot ſays, higher than Veſuvius; but I think he is miſtaken. Both the captain and he agree, that in clear weather it is diſcoverable at the diſtance of 25 leagues; and that at night its flames are to be ſeen ſtill much farther; ſo that its viſible horizon cannot be leſs than 500 miles, which will require a very conſiderable elevation.

The revenue theſe iſlands bring to the King of Naples is by no means inconſiderable. They produce great quantities of alum, ſulphur, nitre, cinnabar, and moſt ſorts of fruits, particularly raiſins, currants, and figs in great perfection; ſome of their wines are likewiſe much eſteemed; particularly the Malvaſia, well known all over Europe.

The iſland of Lipari (from which all the reſt take the name) is by much the largeſt, as well as the moſt fertile. By the deſcription of Ariſtotle, it appears that it was in his time, what Strombolo is in ours, conſidered by ſailors as a light

light houſe, as its fires were never extinguiſhed. It has not ſuffered from ſubterraneous fires for many ages paſt though it every where bears the marks of its former ſtate. This is the iſland ſuppoſed by Virgil (who is one of our travelling companions) to be the habitation of Æolus; but indeed all of them were formerly called Æolian. As they were full of vaſt caverns, roaring with internal fires, poets feigned that Æolus kept the winds priſoners here, and let them out at his pleaſure. This allegorical fiction is of great uſe both to Virgil and Homer, when they want to make a ſtorm, and forms no inconſiderable part of their machinery. A goddeſs has nothing to do but to take a flight to the Lipari iſlands, and Æolus, who was the very pink of courteſy, has always a ſtorm ready at her command.

Homer, indeed, departing ſadly from his uſual dignity, ſuppoſes that Æolus kept the winds here, each tied up in their reſpective bags; and when any particular wind was demanded, he made them a preſent of a bag full of it, to uſe at diſcretion. Some of the ancient hiſtorians (Diodorus, I think) ſays that this fable took its riſe from a wiſe king named Æolus; who, from obſerving the ſmoke of theſe iſlands, and other phænomena attending them, had learned to foretel the weather; and from thence was ſaid to have the command of the winds.

The forge of Vulcan too has been ſuppoſed by the poets to be placed in Hiera, one of theſe iſlands. Virgil ſends him here, to make the celeſtial armour for Æneas, and gives a noble de-

ſcription

-scription of this gloomy habitation*, where he found the Cyclops busy forging a thunderbolt for Jupiter; the account of which is very singular†. This island is now called Volcano, the same that is recorded to have been produced by fire in the time of the republic. So that Virgil commits here a very great anachronism, in sending Vulcan to a place which at that time did not exist, nor for many ages after. But this bold poetical licence he amply repays us for, by the fine description he gives of it. These islands, he says, were called Volcanian as well as Æolian:

"Volcani domus, et Volcania nomine tellus."

So that the change of the name from Hiera to Volcano was a very natural one. This is the island that Pliny calls Terasia; and both Strabo and he give an account of its productions.

19th. Found ourselves within half a mile of the

* Amid the Hesperian and Sicilian flood,
All black with smoke, a rocky island stood,
The dark Vulcanian land, the region of the god.
Here the grim Cyclops ply in vaults profound,
The huge Æolian forge that thunders round.
Th' eternal anvils ring the dungeon o'er;
From side to side the fiery caverns roar, &c.

† Beneath their hands, tremendous to survey!
Half rough, half formed, the dreadful engine lay.
Three points of rain; three forks of hail conspire;
Three arm'd with wind, and three were barb'd with fire,
The mass they temper'd thick with livid rays,
Fear, wrath, and terror, and the lightning's blaze.
PITT.

the coaſt of Sicily, which is low, but finely variegated. The oppoſite coaſt of Calabria is very high, and the mountains are covered with the fineſt verdure. It was almoſt a dead calm, our ſhip ſcarce moving half a mile in an hour, ſo that we had time to get a complete view of the famous rock of Scylla, on the Calabrian ſide, Cape Pylorus on the Sicilian, and the celebrated Straits of the Faro that runs between them. Whilſt we were ſtill ſome miles diſtant from the entry of the ſtraits, we heard the roaring of the current, like the noiſe of ſome large impetuous river confined between narrow banks. This increaſed in proportion as we advanced, till we ſaw the water in many places raiſed to a conſiderable height, and forming large eddies or whirlpools. The ſea in every other place was as ſmooth as glaſs. Our old pilot told us, that he had often ſeen ſhips caught in theſe eddies, and whirled about with great rapidity, without obeying the helm in the ſmalleſt degree. When the weather is calm, there is little danger; but when the waves meet with this violent current, it makes a dreadful ſea. He ſays that there were five ſhips wrecked in this ſpot laſt winter. We obſerved that the current ſet exactly for the rock of Scylla, and would infallibly have carried any thing thrown into it againſt that point; ſo that it was not without reaſon the ancients have painted it as an object of ſuch terror. It is about a mile from the entry of the Faro, and forms a ſmall promontory, which runs a little out to ſea, and meets the whole force of the waters, as they come out of the narroweſt part of the

Straits.

Straits. The head of this promontory is the famous Scylla. It muſt be owned that it does not altogether come up to the formidable deſcription that Homer gives of it; the reading which (like that of Shakeſpeare's Cliff) almoſt makes one's head giddy. Neither is the paſſage ſo wondrous narrow and difficult as he makes it. Indeed it is probable that the breadth of it is greatly increaſed ſince his time, by the violent impetuoſity of the current. And this violence too muſt have always diminiſhed, in proportion as the breadth of the channel increaſed.

Our pilot ſays, there are many ſmall rocks that ſhew their heads near the baſe of the large ones. Theſe are probably the dogs that are deſcribed as howling round the monſter Scylla. There are likewiſe many caverns that add greatly to the noiſe of the water, and tend ſtill to increaſe the horror of the ſcene. The rock is near 200 feet high. There is a kind of caſtle or fort built on its ſummit; and the town of Scylla, or Sciglio, containing three or four hundred inhabitants, ſtands on its ſouth ſide, and gives the title of prince to a Calabreſe family.

As the current was directly againſt us, we were obliged to lie to, for ſome hours, till it turned. The motion of the water ceaſed for ſome time, but in a few minutes it began in the oppoſite direction, though not with ſuch violence. We lay juſt oppoſite to Cape Pylorus; (where the light-houſe is now built.) It is ſaid to have been thus named by Hannibal, in recompence to Pelorus, his pilot, for having put him to death on this ſpot, on a falſe ſuſpicion of his wanting

to betray him: For seeing himself land-locked on all sides, he thought there was no escaping, and that Pelorus had been bribed to deliver him up; but as soon as he discovered the Straits, he repented of his rashness, and some years afterwards erected a statue here in atonement to the manes of Pelorus. Pomponius Mela tells this story; from whence he draws two very wise inferences: That Hannibal must have been extremely passionate; and that he knew nothing at all of geography. Others deny this authority, and say it was named Pelorus from Ulysses' pilot, who was drowned near to this place; but there can be no sort of foundation for this conjecture; for Ulysses' whole crew were drowned at the same time, and he himself was driven through these Straits, mounted on the broken mast of his ship. It is like most disputes among antiquaries, a matter of mighty little consequence; and I leave you at full liberty to choose which of the two accounts you please.

From hence we had an opportunity of observing a pretty large portion of Calabria, which formerly constituted a considerable part of that celebrated country known by the name of Great Greece, and looked upon as one of the most fertile in the empire. These beautiful hills and mountains are covered with trees and brush-wood to the very summit; and appear pretty much in the same state as some of the wilds of America that are just beginning to be cultivated. Some little spots where the woods are cleared away, just serve to shew the natural fertility of the soil; and what this country might

soon

ſoon be brought to, were induſtry and population encouraged; but it ſtill remains a good deal in the ſame ſituation as when the barbarous nations left it; and I believe it is hard to ſay, whether their tyranny or that of Spain has been the moſt oppreſſive. After the invaſion of thoſe nations, and during the time of the dark and barbarous ages, this country (like many others) from the higheſt ſtate of culture and civilization, became a wild and barren wilderneſs, overgrown with thickets and foreſts: and indeed, ſince the revival of arts and agriculture, perhaps of all Europe this is the country that has profited the leaſt; retaining ſtill, both in the wildneſs of its fields and ferocity of its inhabitants, more of the Gothic barbarity than is to be met with any where elſe. Some of theſe foreſts are of a vaſt extent and abſolutely impenetrable; and no doubt conceal in their thickets many valuable monuments of its ancient magnificence. Of this indeed we have a very recent proof in the diſcovery of Peſtum, a Grecian city, that had not been heard of for many ages; till of late ſome of its lofty temples were ſeen, peeping over the tops of the woods; upbraiding mankind for their ſhameful neglect; and calling upon them to bring it once more to light. Accordingly curioſity, and the hopes of gain, a ſtill more powerful motive, ſoon opened a paſſage, and expoſed to view theſe valuable and reſpectable relics.—But here it would be out of place to give you an account of them; I ſhall reſerve that till my return.

As ſoon as our ſhip entered the current, we

were carried along with great velocity towards Meſſina, which is twelve miles from the entry of the Straits. However, as the paſſage widens in proportion as you advance, the current of conſequence becomes leſs rapid. At Meſſina it is four miles broad. At the mouth of the Straits, betwixt the promontories of Pelorus in Sicily, and the Coda de Volpe (or the Fox's Tail) in Calabria, it appears ſcarcely to be a mile. Moſt of the ancient writers are of opinion that Sicily was formerly joined to the continent in this ſpot, and that the ſeparation muſt have been made by ſome violent convulſion of the earth. If this is true, which indeed does not appear improbable, it muſt have happened far beyond the reach of all hiſtorians, as none of them, at leaſt that I have ſeen, pretend any thing but conjecture for the foundation of their opinion. Indeed Claudian (were credit to be given to poets) ſays poſitively,

"Trinacria quondam Italiæ pars una fuit."

And Virgil too, in his third Æneid, tells the ſame ſtory:

"Hæc loca vi quondam, et vaſta convulſa ruina, &c."

Pliny, Strabo, Diodorus, and many others, both hiſtorians and philoſophers, are of the ſame ſentiments, and pretend that the ſtrata in the oppoſite ſides of the Strait perfectly correſpond; Like the white rocks near Dover and Bologne, which have given riſe to an opinion of the ſame kind. However, the ſimilarity

in

in that caſe, is much more ſtriking to the eye at leaſt than in this.

The approach to Meſſina is the fineſt that can be imagined; it is not ſo grand as that of Naples, but it is much more beautiful, and the key exceeds any thing I have yet ſeen, even in Holland. It is built in the form of a creſcent, and is ſurrounded by a range of magnificent buildings, four ſtories high, and exactly uniform, for the ſpace of an Italian mile. The ſtreet betwixt theſe and the ſea is about an hundred feet wide, and forms one of the moſt delightful walks in the world. It enjoys the freeſt air, and commands the moſt beautiful proſpect: It is only expoſed to the morning ſun, being ſhaded all the reſt of the day by theſe buildings. It is beſides conſtantly refreſhed by the cooling breeze from the Straits; for the current of the water produces likewiſe a current in the air, that renders this one of the cooleſt habitations in Sicily.

We caſt anchor about four this afternoon, near the centre of this enchanted ſemi-circle, the beauty of which greatly delighted us; but our pleaſure was ſoon interrupted by a diſcovery that the name of one of our ſervants had been omitted in our bills of health; and an aſſurance from the captain, that if he was diſcovered we ſhould certainly be obliged to perform a long quarantine. Whilſt we were deliberating upon this weighty matter, we obſerved a boat with the people of the health-office approaching us. We had juſt time to get him wrapped up in a hammock, and ſhut down below the hatches; with orders not to ſtir in caſe of a ſearch, and

not appear again above deck till he ſhould be called. The poor fellow was obliged to keep in his hole till it was dark, as our conſul and ſome people of the health-office ſtayed on board much longer than we could have wiſhed, and we are ſtill obliged to conceal him; for if he be diſcovered, we ſhall probably get into a very bad ſcrape. They are particularly ſtrict here in this reſpect: and indeed they have great reaſon to be ſo; ſince this beautiful city was almoſt annihilated by the plague in the year 1743, when upwards of 70,000 people are ſaid to have died in it and its diſtrict, in the ſpace of a few months.

We have now got on ſhore, and are lodged in the moſt wretched of inns; although ſaid to be a firſt-rate one for Sicily; but we are contented; for ſurely after bad ſhip accommodation and ſea ſickneſs, any houſe will appear a palace, and any bit of dry land a paradiſe.

I ſhall ſend this off by the poſt, which goes to-morrow for Naples, and ſhall continue from day to day to give you ſome account of our tranſactions; trifling as they are, there will probably be ſomething new; and it will add greatly to the pleaſure of our expedition, to think that it has contributed to your entertainment. Adieu.

Ever yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER III.

Meſſina, May 20.

THE harbour of Meſſina, is formed by a ſmall promontory or neck of land that runs off from the eaſt end of the city, and ſeparates that beautiful baſon from the reſt of the Straits. The ſhape of this promontory is that of a reaping hook, the curvature of which forms the harbour, and ſecures it from all winds. From the ſtriking reſemblance of its form, the Greeks, who never gave a name that did not either deſcribe the object or expreſs ſome of its moſt remarkable properties, called this place Zancle or the Sickle, and feigned that the ſickle of Saturn fell on this ſpot, and gave it its form. But the Latins who were not quite ſo fond of fable, changed its name to Meſſina (from *meſſis*, a harveſt) becauſe of the great fertility of its fields. It is certainly one of the ſafeſt harbours in the world, after ſhips have got in; but it is likewiſe one of the moſt difficult acceſs. The celebrated gulph or whirlpool of Charybdis lies near to its entry, and often occaſions ſuch an inteſtine and irregular motion in the water, that the helm loſes moſt of its power, and ſhips have great difficulty to get in, even with the faireſt wind that can blow. This whirlpool, I think, is probably formed by the ſmall promontory I have mentioned; which contracting the Straits in this ſpot, muſt neceſſarily increaſe the velocity of the current;

rent; but no doubt other causes, of which we are ignorant, concur, for this will by no means account for all the appearances which it has produced. The great noise occasioned by the tumultuous motion of the waters in this place, made the ancients liken it to a voracious sea-monster perpetually roaring for its prey; and it has been represented by their authors, as the most tremendous passage in the world. Aristotle gives a long and formidable description of it in his 125th chapter De Admirandis, which I find translated in the old Sicilian book I have got here. It begins, "Adeo profundum, horridumque spectaculum, &c." but it is too long to transcribe. It is likewise described by Homer*, 12th of the Odyssey; Virgil†, 3d Æneid; Lucretius,

* Dire Scylla there a scene of horror forms,
And here Charybdis fills the deep with storms:
When the tide rushes from her rumbling caves,
The rough rock roars; tumultuous boil the waves;
They toss, they foam, a wild confusion raise,
Like waters bubbling o'er the fiery blaze;
Eternal mists obscure th' aerial plain,
And high above the rock she spouts the main.
When in her gulphs the rushing sea subsides,
She drains the ocean with her refluent tides.
The rock re-bellows with a thundering sound;
Deep, wondrous deep, below appears the ground.
POPE.

† That realm of old, a ruin huge was rent,
In length of ages from the continent.
With force convulsive burst the isle away;
Thro' the dread opening broke the thundering sea.
At once the thundering sea Sicilia tore,
And sunder'd from the fair Hesperian shore;
And still the neighbouring coasts and towns divides
With scanty channels and contracted tides.

Fierce

Lucretius, Ovid, Salluſt, Seneca, as alſo by many of the old Italian and Sicilian poets, who all ſpeak of it in terms of horror; and repreſent it as an object that inſpired terror, even when looked on at a diſtance. It certainly is not now ſo formidable; and very probably the violence of the motion, continued for ſo many ages, has by degrees worn ſmooth the rugged rocks, and juttling ſhelves, that may have intercepted and confined the waters. The breadth of the Straits too, in this place, I make no doubt is conſiderably enlarged. Indeed, from the nature of things it muſt be ſo; the perpetual friction occaſioned by the current muſt wear away the bank on each ſide, and enlarge the bed of the water.

The veſſels in this paſſage were obliged to go as near as poſſible to the coaſt of Calabria, in order to avoid the ſuction occaſioned by the whirling of the waters in this vortex; by which means when they came to the narroweſt and moſt rapid part of the Straits, betwixt Cape Pylorus and Scylla, they were in great danger of being carried upon that rock. From whence the proverb, ſtill applied to thoſe, who in attempting to avoid one evil fall into another.

"Incidit in Scyllam, cupiens evitare Charibdem."

There

Fierce to the right tremendous Scylla roars,
Charybdis on the left the flood devours:
Thrice ſwallow'd in her womb ſubſides the ſea,
Deep, deep as hell and thrice ſhe ſpouts away
From her black bellowing gulphs diſgorg'd on high
Waves after waves, that daſh againſt the ſky.

PITT.

There is a fine fountain of white marble on the key, reprefenting Neptune holding Scylla and Charybdis claimed, under the emblematical figures of two fea-monfters, as reprefented by the poets.

The little neck of land, forming the harbour of Meffina, is ftrongly fortified. The citadel, which is indeed a very fine work, is built on that part which connects it with the main land. The farthermoft point, which runs out to fea, is defended by four fmall forts, which command the entry into the harbour. Betwixt thefe lie the lazaret, and a light-houfe to warn failors of their approach to Charybdis, as that other on Cape Pelorus is intended to give them notice of Scylla.

It is probably from thefe light-houfes (by the Greeks called Pharoi) that the whole of this celebrated Strait has been denominated the Faro of Meffina.

There are a number of gallies and galliots in this beautiful harbour, which ftill add greatly to its beauty. Three of thefe failed this morning, in order to cruize round the ifland, and to protect it from the fudden invafions of the Barbarians, who are often very troublefome on the fouth coaft. Thefe veffels made a very picturefque appearance as they went out of the harbour; their oars moving all together, with the greateft regularity. I think there are nine or ten men to each oar; and indeed it appears to be the hardeft work you can imagine. They all rife, every ftroke of the oar, and when they pull, they almoft throw themfelves on their backs,

backs, and ſeem to exert their utmoſt force. Theſe wretches are chained to their oars, and ſleep every night on the bare benches, without any thing to throw over them. Yet, what is ſtrange, notwithſtanding all the miſery they ſuffer, I am told there was never known an inſtance of any of them putting themſelves to death. They often, indeed, confer that favour upon one another, but it is only in their quarrels, and by no means out of kindneſs. In a company of Engliſh in the ſame circumſtances, promotion would probably go on much faſter, as there would be no want of vacancies, provided only ropes and knives were to be had.

We intended this morning to have paid our reſpects to the prince of Villa Franca, the governor, and to have delivered our letters; but he is gone to his country-houſe, and as there are no carriages to be had, we are obliged to wait his arrival in town, which will probably be to-morrow or next day.

We are ſtill under a good deal of uneaſineſs about our ſervant, and are obliged to conceal him carefully from the people of the health-office, who ſeem to haunt us, as we have met them this morning in all our walks. Were he to be diſcovered, perhaps ſome of us might have the pleaſure of making a little voyage, on board one of thoſe gallies, for our amuſement. Indeed the captain of the ſhip, poor fellow, would run the greateſt riſk, who is obliged to anſwer for every perſon on board.—We ſhall leave this place as ſoon as poſſible; for I do

not

not believe there is much more to be ſeen about it.

20th at night. After dinner our depute-conſul (a Sicilian) carried us to ſeveral convents, where we were received by the nuns with great politeneſs and affability. We converſed with them for ſome hours through the grate, and found ſome of them by no means deficient, either in point of knowledge or ſprightlineſs; but none of them had ſincerity enough (which we met with in Portugal more than once) to acknowledge the unhappineſs of their ſituation. All pretended to be happy and contented, and declared they would not change their priſon for the moſt brilliant ſituation in life. However, ſome of them had a ſoft melancholy in their countenances, that gave the lie to their words; and I am perſuaded, in a tète-a-tète, and on a more intimate acquaintance, they would have told a very different ſtory. Several of them are extremely handſome; but, indeed, I think they always appear ſo; and am very certain, from frequent experience, that there is no artificial ornament, or ſtudied embelliſhment whatever, that can produce half ſo ſtrong an effect, as the modeſt and ſimple attire of a pretty young nun, placed behind a double iron grate. To ſee an amiable, unaffected, and unadorned perſon, that might have been an honour and an ornament to ſociety, make a voluntary reſignation of her charms, and give up the world and all its pleaſures, for a life of faſting and mortification, it cannot fail to move our pity;

"And

"And pity melts the mind to love."

There is another consideration which tends much to increase these feelings; that is, our total incapacity ever to alter her situation.—The pleasure of relieving an object in distress, is the only refuge we have against the pain which the seeing of that object occasions; but here, this is utterly denied us, and we feel with sorrow, that pity is all we can bestow.

From these, and the like reflections, a man generally feels himself in bad spirits after conversing with amiable nuns. Indeed, it is hardly possible, without a heavy heart, to leave the grate; that inexorable and impenetrable barrier.—At last, we took our leave, expressing our happiness, in being admitted so near them; but at the same time deploring our misery, in seeing them for ever removed at so unmeasurable a distance from us. They were much pleased with our visit, and begged we would repeat it every day during our stay at Messina; but this might prove dangerous.

On leaving the convent, we observed a great concourse of people on the top of a high hill, at some distance from the city. The consul told us, it was the celebration of a great festival in honour of St Francis, and was worth our going to see. Accordingly, we arrived just as the saint made his appearance. He was carried through the croud with vast ceremony, and received the homage of the people with a becoming dignity; after which he was again lodged in his chapel, where he performs a number

of miracles every day, to all thofe who have abundance of money and abundance of faith. His minifters, however, are only a fet of poor greafy capuchins; who indeed do not feem to have enriched themfelves in his fervice. In general, he is but a fhabby mafter, if one may judge by the tattered clothes of his fervants; and St Benedict, who does not pretend to half his fanctity, beats him all to nothing. The people continued to dance, in foft Sicilian meafures, till after fun-fet, when they retired. Many of the country girls are extremely handfome and dance with a good grace. The young fellows were all in their Sunday's clothes, and made a good appearance. The affembly room was a fine green plain on the top of the hill. It pleafed us very much, and put us in mind of fome of Theocritus's defcriptions of the Sicilian pleafures. But Theocritus, if he could have raifed up his head, would probably have been a good deal puzzled what to make of the fhabby figure of St Francis marching through amongft them with fuch majefty and folemnity. Another part of the ceremony too would have greatly alarmed him, as indeed it did us. The whole court before the church was furrounded with a triple row of fmall iron cannon, about fix inches long; thefe were charged to the muzzle, and rammed very hard; after which they were fet clofe to each other, and a train laid, that completed the communication through the whole number, which muft have exceeded 2000. Fire was fet to the train, and in two or three minutes the whole was difcharged by a running fire;

fire; the reports following one another ſo quick, that it was impoſſible for the ear to ſeparate them. The effect was very grand; but it would have been nothing without the fine echo from the high mountains on each ſide of the Straits, which prolonged the ſound for ſome conſiderable time after the firing was finiſhed.

The view from the top of this hill, is beautiful beyond deſcription. The Straits appear like a vaſt majeſtic river flowing ſlowly betwixt two ridges of mountains, and opening by degrees from its narroweſt point, till it ſwells to the ſize of an ocean. Its banks, at the ſame time, adorned with rich corn fields, vineyards, orchards, towns, villages and churches. The proſpect is terminated on each ſide by the tops of high mountains covered with wood.

We obſerved in our walks to-day many of the flowers that are much eſteemed in our gardens, and others too that we are not acquainted with. Larkſpur, flos Adonis, Venus' looking-glaſs, hawkſweed, and very fine lupins grow wild over all theſe mountains. They have likewiſe a variety of flowering ſhrubs; particularly one in great plenty, which I do not recollect ever to have ſeen before: It bears a beautiful round fruit, of a bright ſhining yellow. They call it, Il pomo d'oro, or golden apple. All the fields about Meſſina are covered with the richeſt white clover, intermixed with a variety of aromatic plants, which perfume the air, and render their walks exceedingly delightful. But what is remarkable, we were moſt ſenſible of this perfume, when walking on the harbour

 which

which is at the greateſt diſtance from theſe fields. I mentioned this peculiarity to a Meſſineſe gentleman, who tells me, that the ſalt produced here by the heat of the ſun, emits a grateful odour, ſomething like violets; and it is that, probably, which perfumes the ſea-ſhore. On conſulting Fazzelo De rebus Siculis, I find he takes notice of the ſame ſingularity; and likewiſe obſerves, that the water of the Straits has a viſcous or glutinous quality, which by degrees cements the ſand and gravel together, and at laſt conſolidates them to the ſolidity of the rock.

There are fine ſhady walks on all ſides of Meſſina; ſome of theſe run along the ſea-ſhore, and are for ever fanned by the cooling breeze from the Straits. The houſes are large, and moſt of the articles of life are cheap and in plenty; particularly fiſh, which are reckoned better here, than any where elſe in the Mediterranean. The hire of lodgings is next to nothing; almoſt one half of that noble range of buildings I have deſcribed, being abſolutely uninhabited ſince the deſolation of 1743; ſo that the proprietors are glad to get tenants on any terms. It now occurs to me, that from all theſe conſiderations, there is no place I have ſeen, ſo admirably calculated for the reſidence of that flock of valetudinarians, which every autumn leave our country with the ſwallows, in ſearch of warm climates. I have been enquiring with regard to their winter ſeaſon, and find all agree, that, in general, it is much preferable to that of Naples. They allow they have ſometimes heavy rain for two or three weeks; but it never laſts longer;

longer; and beſides, they have always ſome fair hours every day, when people can go out for exerciſe; for the moment the rain is over, the walks are dry, the ſoil being a light gravel.

The advantages of Meſſina over Naples in other reſpects, I think, are conſiderable. At Naples there are no walks; and, the truth is, they have no occaſion for them, no more indeed than they have for legs; for you know as well as I, that walking there, is little leſs infamous than ſtealing; and any perſon that makes uſe of his limbs is looked upon as a blackguard, and deſpiſed by all good company. The rides too are all at a great diſtance; and you are obliged to go ſome miles on ſtreets and pavement before you get into the country; beſides paſſing the vile grotto of Pauſillipe, where you are in danger of being blinded, and ſtifled with duſt. There are ſeldom any public diverſions here; the attending of which at Naples, and complying with their bad hours, does often more than counteract all the benefit obtained from the climate. That deteſtable practice of gaming too is by no means ſo prevalent here; which from the anxiety it occaſions to the mind, and laſſitude to the body, muſt be death to all hectic people, weak breaſts, or delicate nerves. I could ſay much more on this ſubject, but as I have many of theſe circumſtances only from the report of the inhabitants, it makes me more diffident, than if I had known them from my own experience.

We found our banker, Mr M——, a very ſenſible man, and ſpent ſome hours with him,

 both

both this morning and evening, very agreeably. He has given us ſome account of the police of the country, the moſt ſingular, perhaps, of any in the world, to ſuch a degree, indeed, that I ſhall not venture to tell it you, till I have talked it over with ſome other people, to ſee if the accounts agree;—though from the character that gentleman bears, both here and at Naples, he is as good authority as any in the iſland.

The prince of Villa Franca is arrived; ſo that we ſhall probably have our audience to-morrow morning. Adieu—We are juſt going to ſup upon ſtakes made of the pieſce ſpada or ſword-fiſh, which are caught in great plenty in theſe ſeas. The ſword of this one, is upwards of 4 feet long; and a formidable weapon it is;—not unlike a Highland broad ſword. This fiſh, when cut, bears a perfect reſemblance to fleſh; ſo much, that none of us doubted, it was beef-ſtakes they were dreſſing for us, and expreſſed our ſurpriſe at finding that fiſh in Sicily.—Good night.

LETTER IV.

21ſt. WE are juſt returned from the prince's. He received us politely, but with a good deal of ſtate. He offered us the uſe of his carriages, as there are none to be hired; and, in the uſual ſtyle, deſired to know in what he could be of ſervice to us. We told him (with an apology for our abrupt departure) that we were obliged

to

ſet off to-morrow, and begged his protection on our journey. He replied, that he would give orders for guards to attend us, that ſhould be anſwerable for every thing; that we need give ourſelves no farther trouble; that whatever number of mules we had occaſion for, ſhould be ready at the door of the inn, at any hour we ſhould think proper to appoint: He added, that we might entirely rely on thoſe guards, who were people of the moſt determined reſolution, as well as of the moſt approved fidelity, and would not fail to chaſtiſe on the ſpot, any perſon who ſhould preſume to impoſe upon us.

Now, who do you think theſe truſty guards are compoſed of? Why of the moſt daring, and moſt hardened villains, perhaps, that are to be met with upon earth, who, in any other country, would have been broken upon the wheel, or hung in chains; but are here publicly protected, and univerſally feared and reſpected. It was this part of the police of Sicily, that I was afraid to give you an account of: But I have now converſed with the prince's people on the ſubject, and they have confirmed every circumſtance, Mr M—— made me acquainted with.

He told me, that in this eaſt part of the iſland, called Val Demoni, (from the devils that are ſuppoſed to inhabit mount Ætna) it has ever been found impracticable to extirpate the banditti; there being numberleſs caverns and ſubterraneous paſſages in that mountain, where no troops could poſſibly purſue them: That beſides, as they are known to be perfectly determined and

and resolute, never failing to take a dreadful revenge on all who have offended them, the prince of Villa Franca has embraced it, not only as the safest, but likewise as the wisest, and most political scheme, to become their declared patron and potector. And such of them as think proper to leave their mountains and forests, though perhaps only for a time, are sure to meet with good encouragement, and security in his service; they enjoy the most unbounded confidence, which, in no instance, they have ever yet been found to make an improper or a dishonest use of. They are clothed in the prince's livery yellow and green, with silver lace; and wear likewise a badge of their honourable order, which entitles them to universal fear and respect from the people.

I have just been interrupted by an upper servant of the prince's, who, both by his looks and language, seems to be of the same worthy fraternity. He tells us, that he has ordered our muleteers, at their peril, to be ready by day-break; but that we need not go till we think proper; for it is their business to attend on *nostri eccellenzi*. He says, he has likewise ordered two of the most desperate fellows in the whole island to accompany us; adding, in a sort of whisper, that we need be under no apprehension; for if any person should presume to impose upon us to the value of a single baiocc*, they would certainly put them to death. I gave him an ounce†, which I knew was what he expected; on which he redoubled his bows and

* A small coin. † About eleven shillings.

and his eccellenzis, and declared we were the moſt *honorabili Signori* he had ever met with, and that if we pleaſed, he himſelf ſhould have the honour of attending us, and would chaſtiſe any perſon that ſhould dare to take the wall of us, or injure us in the ſmalleſt trifle. We thanked him for his zeal, ſhewing him we had ſwords of our own. On which bowing reſpectfully, he retired.

I can now, with more aſſurance, give you ſome account of the converſation I had with Signior M——, who as I ſaid, appears to be a very intelligent man, and has reſided here for theſe many years.

He ſays, that in ſome circumſtances theſe banditti are the moſt reſpectable people of the iſland; and have by much the higheſt and moſt romantic notions of what they call their point of honour. That, however criminal they may be with regard to ſociety in general; yet, with reſpect to one another, and to every perſon to whom they have once profeſſed it, they have ever maintained the moſt unſhaken fidelity. The magiſtrates have often been obliged to protect them, and even pay them court, as they are known to be perfectly determined and deſperate; and ſo extremely vindictive, that they will certainly put any perſon to death, who has ever given them juſt cauſe of provocation. On the other hand, it never was known that any perſon who had put himſelf under their protection, and ſhewed that he had confidence in them, had cauſe to repent it, or was injured by any of them, in the moſt minute trifle; but on the

contrary

contrary, they will protect him from impositions of every kind, and scorn to go-halves with the landlord, like most other conductors and travelling servants; and will defend him with their lives, if there is occasion. That those of their number who have inlisted themselves in the service of society, are known and respected by the other banditti all over the island: and the persons of those they accompany are ever held sacred. For these reasons, most travellers chuse to hire a couple of them from town to town; and may thus travel over the whole island in safety. To illustrate their character the more, he added two stories, which happened but a few days ago, and are still in every body's mouth:

A number of people were found digging in a place where some treasure was supposed to be hid during the plague: As this had been forbid under the most severe penalties, they were immediately carried to prison, and expected to have been treated without mercy; but luckily for the others, one of these heroes happened to be of the number. He wrote to the Prince of Villa Franca, and made use of such powerful arguments in their favour, that they were all immediately set at liberty.

This will serve to shew their consequence with the civil power; the other story will give you a strong idea of their barbarous ferocity, and the horrid mixture of stubborn vice and virtue (if I may call it by that name) that seems to direct their actions. I should have mentioned, that they have a practice of borrowing money from the country people, who never dare refuse

refuse them; and if they promise to pay it, they have ever been found punctual and exact, both as to the time and the sum; and would much rather rob and murder an innocent person, than fail of payment at the day appointed: And this they have often been obliged to do, only in order as they say to fulfil their engagements, and to save their honour.

It happened within this fortnight, that the brother of one of these heroic banditti having occasion for money, and not knowing how to procure it, determined to make use of his brother's name and authority, an artifice which he thought could not easily be discovered; accordingly he went to a country priest, and told him his brother had occasion for twenty ducats, which he desired he would immediately lend him. The priest assured him that he had not so large a sum, but that if he would return in a few days it should be ready for him. The other replied, that he was afraid to return to his brother with this answer; and desired, that he would by all means take care to keep out of his way, at least till such time as he had pacified him; otherwise he could not be answerable for the consequences.—As bad fortune would have it, the very next day the priest and the robber met in a narrow road; the former fell a-trembling as the latter approached, and at last dropped on his knees to beg for mercy. The robber, astonished at his behaviour, desired to know the cause of it. The trembling priest answered, "Il denaro, il denaro, the money, the money—but send your brother to morrow, and you shall have

have it." The haughty robber aſſured him, that he diſdained taking money of a poor prieſt; adding, that if any of his brothers had been low enough to make ſuch a demand, he himſelf was ready to advance the ſum. The prieſt then acquainted him with the viſit he had received the preceding night from his brother, by his order: aſſuring him that if he had been maſter of the ſum, he ſhould immediately have ſupplied it.—Well, ſays the robber, I will now convince you whether my brother or I are moſt to be believed; you ſhall go with me to his houſe, which is but a few miles diſtant.—On their arrival before the door, the robber called on his brother, who never ſuſpecting the diſcovery, immediately came to the balcony; but on perceiving the prieſt, he began to make excuſes for his conduct. The robber told him, there was no excuſe to be made; that he only deſired to know the fact, Whether he had gone to borrow money of that prieſt in his name or not?—On his owning he had, the robber with deliberate coolneſs lifted up his blunderbuſs to his ſhoulder, and ſhot him dead; and turning to the aſtoniſhed prieſt, "You will now be perſuaded, ſaid he, that I had no intention of robbing you at leaſt."

You may now judge how happy we muſt be in the company of our guards. I don't know but this very hero may be one of them; as we are aſſured they are two of the moſt intrepid and reſolute fellows in the iſland. I will not cloſe this letter, till I give you ſome account of our journey. In the mean time adieu. We are going to take a look of the churches and public buildings;

buildings: but with these I shall trouble you very little.

21st at night. We have been very well entertained both from what we have seen and heard. We used to admire the dexterity of some of the divers at Naples, when they went to the depth of forty eight or fifty feet, and could not conceive how a man could remain three minutes under water without drawing breath; but these are nothing to the feats of one Colas, a native of this place, who is said to have lived for several days in the sea, without coming to land, and from thence got the surname of Pesce, or the fish. Some of the Sicilian authors affirm, that he caught fish merely by his agility in the water; and the credulous Kircher asserts, that he could walk across the Straits at the bottom of the sea.—Be that as it will, he was so much celebrated for swimming and diving, that one of their kings (Frederick) came on purpose to see him perform: which royal visit proved fatal to poor Pesce; for the king, after admiring his wonderful force and agility, had the cruelty to propose his diving near the gulph of Charybdis; and to tempt him the more, threw in a large golden cup, which was to be his prize should he bring it up. Pesce made two attempts, and astonished the spectators by the time he remained under water: but in the third, it is thought he was caught by the whirlpool, as he never appeared more; and his body is said to have been found some time afterwards near Taurominum (about thirty miles distant) it having been observed that what is swallowed up

by Charybdis is carried ſouth by the current, and thrown out upon that coaſt. On the contrary, nothing wrecked here was ever carried through the Straits, or thrown out on the north ſide of Sicily, unleſs we believe what Homer ſays of the ſhip of Ulyſſes.

We have been again to take a view of the Straits at this famous whirlpool, and are more and more convinced that it muſt be infinitely diminiſhed; indeed, in compariſon of what it was, almoſt reduced to nothing. The ſea appeared to have no extraordinary motion there, and ſhips and boats ſeemed to paſs it with eaſe. When we compare this its preſent ſtate, with the formidable deſcription of ſo many ancient authors, poets, hiſtorians, and philoſophers, it appears indeed not improbable that this iſland has been torn from the continent by ſome violent convulſion, and that near to this ſpot huge caverns have been opened, which, drinking in the waters in one courſe of the current, and throwing them out in the other, may perhaps in ſome meaſure account for the phenomena of Charybdis—I find it deſcribed both by Homer and Virgil, as alternatively ſwallowing up, and throwing out every object that approached it*. Now, is it not probable, that theſe caverns in proceſs of time have been, in a great meaſure, filled up by the immenſe quantities of rocks, ſand, gravel, &c. that were

* Dextrum Scylla latus, lævum implacata Charybdis
Obſidet, atque imo barathri ter gurgite vaſtos
Sorbet in abruptum fluctus, rurſuſque ſub auras
Erigit alternos, et ſidera verberat unda.

were perpetually carried in by the force of the current?—I own I am not quite ſatisfied with this ſolution, but at preſent I cannot think of a better:—The fact, however, is certain, that it muſt have been a dreadful object even in Virgil's time, elſe he never would have made Æneas and his fleet perceive its effects at ſo great a diſtance, and immediately run out to ſea to avoid it; nor would he have made Helenus at ſuch pains to caution him againſt that dangerous gulph, and adviſe him rather to make the whole tour of Sicily than attempt to paſs it. Indeed, it is ſo often mentioned both in the voyage of Æneas and Ulyſſes, and always in ſuch frightful terms, that we cannot doubt of its having been a very terrible object*.

After ſeeing the beautiful harbour of Meſſina, we have found nothing much worthy of notice

* Seneca gives this account of it in a letter to Lucillus; "Scyllam ſaxum eſſe, et quidem terrible navigantibus optime ſcio; Charybdis an reſpondeat fabulis preſcribi mihi deſidero, fac nos certiores, utrum uno tantum vento agatur in vortices, an omnis tempeſtas, ac mare illud contorqueat, et an verum ſit quidquid ill freti turbine areptum eſt," &c.

And the following is a tranſlation from Strabo.

"Ante urbem Paululum in trajectu Charybdis oſtenditur: Profundum quidem immenſum: Quo inundationes freti: mirum in modum navigia detrahunt: magnas per circumductiones, et vortices precipata, quibis abſorptis, ac diſſolutis; naufragiorum fragmenta ad Tauromitanum lictus attrahuntur," &c.

"Eſt igitur Charybdis, (ſays Salluſt) mare periculoſum nautis; quod contrariis fluctuum curſibus, colliſionem facit, et rapta quodque abſorbet."

But theſe are moderate indeed when compared to the deſcriptions of the poets.

in the city. Some of the churches are handſome, and there are a few tolerable paintings. One ceremony, from the account they give it, I ſhould like much to have ſeen: The celebration of the feaſt of the Vara. It appears, indeed, to be a very ſingular exhibition, and I am heartily ſorry it does not happen at this ſeaſon. In order to the more dignified appearance of the Virgin Mary on this occaſion, they have invented a very curious machine, which I am told repreſents heaven, or at leaſt a part of it. It is of a huge ſize, and moves through the ſtreet with vaſt pomp and ceremony. In the centre is the principal figure, which repreſents the Virgin; and a little higher, there are three others to denote the Trinity. Round theſe, are a number of wheels, ſaid to be of a very curious conſtruction. Every wheel contains a legion of angels, according to their different degrees of precedency: ſeraphims, cherubims, and powers. Theſe are repreſented by a great number of beautiful little children, all glittering in clothes of gold and ſilver tiſſue; with wings of painted feathers fixed to their ſhoulders. When the machine is ſet in motion, all theſe wheels move round, and the different choirs of angels continue in a conſtant flutter, ſinging Hallelujahs round the Trinity and the Virgin during the whole of the proceſſion, and are ſaid to make a moſt beautiful appearance. This is all I could learn of this ſingular ſhew, neither were we admitted to ſee the machine; conſcious, I ſuppoſe, of the ridicule of which it is ſuſceptible, they did not chuſe to unveil ſo ſacred an object to the eyes of heretics.—

This

This iſland has ever been famous for the celebration of its feaſts, even in ancient as well as modern times. They ſpare no expence; and as they have a large ſhare both of ſuperſtition and invention, they never fail to produce ſomething either very fine or very ridiculous. The feaſt of St Roſolia at Palermo is ſaid to be one of the fineſt ſhows in Europe, and coſts that city every year a large ſum. They aſſure us there is more taſte and magnificence diſplayed in it, than in any thing of the kind in Italy; and adviſe us by all means to attend it, as it happens ſome time near the middle of ſummer, when we ſhall probably be in that end of the iſland.

If you pleaſe we ſhall now take leave of Meſſina;—I did not expect to make ſo much out of it.—But it would not be fair neither: without at leaſt putting you in mind of the great veneration it has ever been held in by the reſt of Sicily, for the aſſiſtance it gave to Count Rugiero in freeing the iſland from the yoke of the Saracens; in conſideration of which, great privileges were granted it by the ſucceeding kings; ſome of which are ſaid ſtill to remain. It was here that the Normans landed; and this city, by the policy of ſome of its own inhabitants, was the firſt conqueſt they made; after which their victorious arms were ſoon extended over the whole iſland; and a final period put to the Saracen tyranny. Count Rugiero fixed the ſeat of government at Palermo; and put the political ſyſtem of the iſland upon a ſolid baſis; of which the form (and the form alone) ſtill remains to this day. He divided the whole iſland into

three parts; one he gave to his officers, another to the church, and a third he reserved for himself. Of these three branches he composed his parliament, that respectable body, of which the skeleton only now exists: for it has long ago lost all its blood, nerves, and animal spirits; and for many ages past has been reduced to a perfect caput mortuum. The superstitious tyranny of Spain has not only destroyed the national spirits of its own inhabitants, but likewise that of every other country which has fallen under its power. Adieu.

Ever yours.

P. S. Apropos! There is one thing I had almost forgot, and I should never have forgiven myself. Do you know the most extraordinary phenomenon in the world is often observed near to this place? I laugh'd at it at first as you will do; but I am now convinced of its reality; and am persuaded too, that if ever it had been thoroughly examined by a philosophical eye, the natural cause must long ago have been assigned.

It has often been remarked, both by the ancients and moderns, that in the heat of summer, after the sea and air have been much agitated by the winds, and a perfect calm succeeds, there appears, about the time of dawn, in that part of the heavens over the Straits, a great variety of singular forms, some at rest and some moving about with great velocity. These forms, in proportion as the light increases, seem to become more aerial; till at last, sometime before sun-rise, they entirely disappear.

The

The Sicilians represent this as the most beautiful sight in nature; Leanti, one of their latest and best writers, came here on purpose to see it: He says, the heavens appeared crowded with a variety of objects: He mentions palaces, woods, gardens, &c. besides the figures of men, and other animals, that appear in motion amongst them. No doubt, the imagination must be greatly aiding, in forming this aerial creation; but as so many of their authors, both ancient and modern, agree in the fact, and give an account of it from their own observation, there certainly must be some foundation for the story. There is one Giardini, a Jesuit, who has lately written a treatise of this phenomenon, but I have not been able to find it: The celebrated Messinese Gallo has likewise published something on this singular subject; if I can procure either of them in the island, you shall have a more perfect account of it. The common people, according to custom, give the whole merit to the devil; and indeed it is by much the shortest and easiest way of accounting for it. Those who pretend to be philosophers, and refuse him this honour, are greatly puzzled what to make of it. They think it may be owing to some uncommon refraction, or reflection of the rays, from the water of the Straits; which, as it is at that time carried about in a variety of eddies and vortexes, must consequently, say they, make a variety of appearances on any medium where it is reflected. This, I think, is nonsense; or at least, very near it; and till they can say more to the purpose, I think they had much

much better have left it in the hands of the old gentleman. I ſuſpect it is ſomething in the nature of our Aurora Borealis, and, like many of the great phenomena of Nature, depends upon electrical cauſes; which, in future ages, I have little doubt, will be found to be as powerful an agent in regulating the univerſe, as gravity is in this age, or as the ſubtile fluid was in the laſt.

The electrical fluid, in this country of volcanoes, is probably produced in much greater quantity than in any other. The air ſtrongly impregnated with this matter, and confined betwixt two ridges of mountains; at the ſame time exceedingly agitated from below by the violence of the current, and the impetuous whirling of the waters; may it not be ſuppoſed to produce a variety of appearances? And may not the lively Sicilian imaginations, animated by a belief in demons, and all the wild offspring of ſuperſtition, give theſe appearances as great a variety of forms? Remember, I do not ſay it is ſo; and hope yet to have it in my power to give you a better account of this matter. However, if you ſhould ſuppoſe me in this ſtory, or in any future one I may tell you, to be inclined to the fabulous, you will pleaſe to remember that I am now in the country of fable; this iſland having given riſe to more perhaps, except Greece, than all the world beſide. You have, therefore, only to ſuppoſe that theſe regions are ſtill contagious; and call to mind that mount Ætna has ever been the great mother of monſters and chimeras both in the ancient and modern world. However, I ſhall, if poſſible,
keep

keep free of the infection, and entertain you only with such subjects as fall under my own observation. But indeed, from what I have already heard of that wonderful mountain, the most moderate accouut of it would appear highly fabulous to all such as are unacquainted with objects of this kind. Adieu. We think of setting off to-morrow by day-break. I am sorry it has not been a storm, that we might have had a a chance of seeing Pandemonium reared over our heads, and all the devils at work around it.

I shall leave this to be sent by the first post, and shall write you again from Catania, if we escape unhurt from all the perils of Ætna.

Adieu.

LETTER V.

Giardini, near Taurominum,
May 22d.

WE have had a delightful journey, and if all Sicily be but as agreeable, we shall not repent of our expedition. We left Messina early this morning, with six mules for ourselves and servants, and two for our baggage. This train, I assure you, makes no contemptible appearance; particularly when you call to mind our front and rear-guard; by much the most conspicuous part of it. These are two great drawcansir figures, armed cap-a-pie, with a broad hanger, two enormous pistols, and a long arquebuse: This they kept cockt and ready for action in all suspicious

ſuſpicious places; where they recounted abundance of wonderful ſtories of robberies and murders; ſome of them with ſuch very minute circumſtances, that I am fully perſuaded they themſelves were the principal actors. However, I look upon our ſituation as perfectly ſecure; they pay us great reſpect, and take the utmoſt pains that we ſhall not be impoſed upon. Indeed, I think, they impoſe upon every body except us; for they tax the bills according to their pleaſure; and ſuch cheap ones I never paid before. To-day's dinner for eleven men (our three muleteers included) and feeding for ten mules and horſes, did not amount to half a guinea. And, although we pay them high, (an ounce a day each) yet I am perſuaded they ſave us at leaſt one half of it on our bills. They have entertained us with ſome of their feats, and make no ſcruple of owning their having put ſeveral people to death; but add, "Mas tutti, tutti honorabilmente,"—That is to ſay, they did not do it in a daſtardly manner, nor without juſt provocation.

The ſea-coaſt of Sicily is very rich; the ſides of ſome of the mountains are highly cultivated, and preſent the moſt agreeable aſpect that can be imagined:—corn, wine, oil, and ſilk, all mixed together, and in the greateſt abundance: However, the cultivated part is but ſmall in proportion to what is lying waſte, and only ſerves to ſhew the great fertility of this iſland, were it peopled, and in induſtrious hands. The ſides of the road are covered with a variety of flowers and of flowering ſhrubs; ſome of them

exceedingly

exceedingly beautiful. The inclofures are many of them fenced with hedges of the Indian fig, or prickly pear; as in Spain and Portugal; and our guides affure us, that in many of the parched ravines round Ætna, there are plenty of trees which produce both cinnamon and pepper; not fo ftrong they allow, as thofe of the fpice iflands, but which are fold to the merchants at a low price, by a fet of banditti, who drefs themfelves like hermits: Thefe fpices are mixed with the true pepper and cinnamon from the Indies, and fent over all Europe.

The road from Meffina to this place is extremely romantic. It lies the whole way along the coaft, and commands the view of Calabria, and the fouth part of the Straits; covered with chebecks, galleys, galliots, and a quantity of fifhing-boats. The view on the right hand is confined by high mountains, on the very fummits of which they have built feveral confiderable towns and villages, which with their churches and fteeples make a very picturefque appearance. They have chofen this elevated fituation, I fuppofe, with a double view; to protect them both from their enemies, and from the violent heat of the climate: This forenoon, we found it exceffive, but had the fineft fwimming in the world before dinner; which kept us cool and frefh for all the reft of the day. We have befides provided ourfelves with umbrellas, without which, at this feafon, travelling would be impracticable.

Betwixt this place and Meffina, a little to the right, lie the mountains, formerly called the Nebrodes; and likewife the mountain of Neptune

tune, which is reckoned the higheſt of that chain. It is celebrated for a gulph or crater on its ſummit, from whence at particular times, there iſſues an exceeding cold wind, with ſuch violence, that it is difficult to approach it. I was ſorry to paſs this ſingular mountain, but it would have delayed us a day or two to viſit it; and we are haſtening with impatience to a much greater object: It is now named Il monto Scuderio, and is ſaid to be ſo high that the Adriatic can be ſeen from its ſummit. From the deſcription they give of it, it appears evidently to be an old volcano. The Niſſo takes its riſe from this mountain; a river renowned in antiquity for the gold found in its channel; for which reaſon, it was by the Greeks called Chryſothoas. It is ſaid, the remains of the ancient gold mines are ſtill to be ſeen near the ſource of the river; but the modern maſters of Sicily have never been enterpriſing enough to explore them. It was on this charming coaſt, where the flocks of Apollo were kept by his daughters, Phæthuſa and Lampetie; the ſeizing of which by Ulyſſes' companions, proved the cauſe of their deaths, and of all his ſubſequent misfortunes. The mountain of Tauromina is very high and ſteep, and the road up to it is exceedingly rugged.

This once famous city is now reduced to an inſignificant burgh; yet even theſe ſmall remains give a high idea of its former magnificence. The theatre, I think, is accounted the largeſt in the world. It appears to me greatly ſuperior to that of Adrian's villa, near Rome. It is entire enough, to give a very tolerable idea

idea of the Roman theatre, and indeed aſtoniſh-es by its vaſtneſs; nor can I conceive how any voice would extend through the prodigious number of people it muſt have contained. I paced about one quarter of it; over the boxes that were intended for the women, which is not near the outward circle of all; the reſt is ſo broken, that I could get no farther. It meaſured about 120 ordinary ſteps, ſo that you may conceive the greatneſs of the whole. The ſeats front mount Ætna, which makes a glorious appearance from this place; and no doubt has often diverted their attention from the ſcene. It ariſes from an immenſe baſe, and mounts equally on all ſides to its ſummit: It is juſt now throwing out volumes of white ſmoke, which do not riſe in the air, but ſeem to roll down the ſide of the mountain like a vaſt torrent. The aſcent of Ætna on each ſide is computed at about 30 miles, and the circumference of its baſe at 150: I think it does not appear to be ſo much; but I ſhall probably be enabled to give you a fuller account of it afterwards.

After admiring the great theatre of Tauro-minum, we went to examine the Naumachia, and the reſervoirs for ſupplying it with water. About 150 paces of one ſide of the wall of the Naumachia remains; but as this is not complete, there is no judging of its original dimenſions. This is ſuppoſed to have been a large ſquare, incloſed with ſtrong walls, and capable of being filled with water on occaſion; intended for the exhibition of ſea-fights, and all naval exerciſes: there were four reſervoirs for ſupplying this

with water. All are upon the ſame grand ſcale. One of theſe is almoſt entire; it is ſupported by a great number of ſtrong pillars, in the ſame manner as thoſe of Titus' baths at Rome, and ſeveral others you may have ſeen in Italy.—I would dwell longer on objects of this kind; but I am perſuaded deſcriptions can give but a very imperfect idea of them; and to mark out the preciſe dimenſions with a mathematical exactneſs, where there is nothing very remarkable, muſt ſurely be but a dry work, both to the writer and reader. I ſhall therefore content myſelf (I hope it will content you too) with endeavouring to communicate, as entire as poſſible, the ſame impreſſion I myſelf ſhall receive, without deſcending too much to particulars; or fatiguing myſelf or you with the menſuration of antique walls, merely becauſe they are ſuch, except where there is indeed ſomething very ſtriking and different too, from what has already been deſcribed in Italy.

I own I deſpair of ſucceſs: Few things I believe in writing more difficult than thus "s'emparer de l'imagination," to ſeize—to make ourſelves maſter's of the reader's imagination, to carry it alongwith us through every ſcene, and make it in a manner congenial with our own; every proſpect opening upon him with the ſame light, and ariſing in the ſame colours, and at the ſame inſtant too, as upon us: For where deſcriptions fail in this, the pleaſure of reading them muſt be very trivial. Now, perhaps, this ſame journal ſtyle is the moſt favourable of any to produce theſe effects. It is at leaſt the moſt agree-

able

able to the writer; who never has his ſubject to ſeek, but needs only recollect what has paſſed ſince he laſt laid down the pen, and travel the day over again; and if he travels it to good purpoſe, it ought to be equally agreeable to the reader too, who thereby becomes one of the party, and bears a ſhare in all the pleaſures of the journey without ſuffering from the fatigues of it.

One of my great difficulties, I ſee, will be the finding proper places to write in, for the inns are altogether, execrable, and there is no ſuch thing as getting a room to one's ſelf: I am juſt now writing on the end of a barrel, which I choſe rather than the table, as it is farther removed from noiſe. I muſt therefore entreat you, once for all, to excuſe incorrectneſs and want of method. How can one be methodical upon a barrel?—It has ever been the moſt declared enemy to method. You might as well expect a ſermon from Bacchus, or a coherent ſpeech from our friend lord —— after he has finiſhed the third bottle. You will be pleaſed then juſt to take things as they occur. Were I obliged to be ſtrictly methodical, I ſhould have no pleaſure in writing you theſe letters; and then, if my poſition is juſt, you could have no pleaſure in reading them.

Our guards have procured us beds; though not in the town of Taurominum, but in Giardini, a village at the foot of the mountain on which it ſtands. This people are extremely attentive, and have produced us an excellent ſupper and good wine, which now waits—but ſhall

wait no longer. Adieu. To-morrow, we in-tend to climb mount Ætna on this (its east) side, if we find it practicable.

Ever yours.

LETTER VI.

Catania, May 2.

I AM already almost two days in arrears. Yes-terday we were so much fatigued with the abo-minable roads of Mount Ætna, that I was not able to wield a pen; and to-day, I assure you has by no means been a day of rest; however I must not delay any longer, otherwise I shall never be able to make up my lee-way. I am afraid you will suffer more from the fatigues of the journey than I at first apprehended.

We left Giardini at five o'clock. About half a mile farther the first region of mount Ætna begins, and here they have set up the statue of a saint, for having prevented the lava from running up the mountain of Taurominum and destroying the adjacent country; which the people think it certainly must have done, had it not been for this kind interposition; but he very wisely, as well as humanely, conducted it down a low valley to the sea.

We left the Catania road on the left, and be-gan to ascend the mountain, in order to visit the celebrated tree, known by the name of *Castagno de Cento Cavalli* (The chesnut tree of hundred

R. Scott sculpt.

hundred horſe): which for ſome centuries paſt has been looked upon as one of the greateſt wonders of Ætna. We had likewiſe propoſed, if poſſible, to gain the ſummit of the mountain by this ſide, and to deſcend by the ſide of Catania; but we were ſoon convinced of the impoſſibility of this, and obliged, with a good deal of reluctance, to relinquiſh that part of our ſcheme.

As we advanced in the firſt region of Ætna, we obſerved that there had been eruptions of fire all over this country at a great diſtance from the ſummit, or principal crater of the mountain. On our road to the village of Piedmonte, I took notice of ſeveral very conſiderable craters; and ſtones of a large ſize, ſcattered all around, that had been diſcharged from them. Theſe ſtones are preciſely ſuch as are thrown out of the crater of mount Veſuvius; and indeed, the lava too ſeems to be of the ſame nature, though rather more porous.

The diſtance from Giardini to Piedmonte is only ten miles, but as the road is exceedingly rough and difficult, we took near four hours to travel it. The barometer, which at Giardini (on the ſea ſide) ſtood at 29 inches 10 lines, had now fallen to 27 : 3. Farenheit's thermometer (made by Mr Adams in London) 73 degrees. We found the people extremely curious and inquiſitive to know our errand, which when we told, many of them offered to accompany us. Of theſe we choſe two; and after drinking our tea, which was matter of great ſpeculation to the inhabitants, who had never before ſeen a breakfaſt

breakfaſt of this kind, we began to climb the mountain.

We were directed for five or ſix miles of our road by an aqueduct, which the Prince of Palagonia has made at a great expence, to ſupply Piedmonte with water. After we left the aqueduct, the aſcent became a good deal more rapid, till we arrived at the beginning of the ſecond region, called by the natives *la Regione Sylvoſa*, or the woody region; becauſe it is compoſed of one vaſt foreſt, that extends all around the mountain. Part of this was deſtroyed by a very ſingular event, not later than the year 1755. —During an eruption of the volcano, an immenſe torrent of boiling water iſſued, as is imagined, from the great crater of the mountain, and in an inſtant poured down to its baſe; overwhelming and ruining ever thing it met with in its courſe. Our conductors ſhewed us the tracks of the torrent, which are ſtill very viſible; but are now beginning to recover verdure and vegetation, which for ſome time appeared to have been loſt. The track it has left, ſeems to be about a mile and a half broad; and in ſome places ſtill more.

The common opinion, I find, is, that this water was raiſed by the power of ſuction through ſome communication betwixt the volcano and the ſea; the abſurdity of which is too glaring to need a refutation. The power of ſuction alone, even ſuppoſing a perfect vacuum, could never raiſe water to more than thirty-three or thirty-four feet, which is equal to the weight of a column of air the whole height

the atmoſphere. But this circumſtance, I ſhould imagine, might be eaſily enough accounted for; either by a ſtream of lava iſſuing ſuddenly into one of the vallies of ſnow, that occupy the higher regions of the mountain, and melting it down: or what I think is ſtill more probable, that the melted ſnow, finding vaſt caverns and reſervoirs in the mountain, where it is lodged for ſome time, till the extenſive heat of the lava below burſt the ſides of theſe caverns, produces this phenomenon which has been matter of great ſpeculation to the Sicilian philoſophers, and has employed the pens of ſeveral of them. The ſame thing happened in an eruption of Veſuvius laſt century, and in an inſtant ſwept away about 500 people, who were marching in proceſſion at the foot of the mountain, to implore the mediation of St Janarius.

Near to this place we paſſed through ſome beautiful woods of cork and ever green oak, growing abſolutely out of the lava, the ſoil having as yet hardly filled the crevices of that porous ſubſtance; and, not a great way farther, I obſerved ſeveral little mountains that ſeemed to have been formed by a late eruption. I diſmounted from my mule, and climbed to the top of them all. They are ſeven in number; every one of them with a regular cup or crater on the top, and in ſome the great gulph or (as they call it) *Voragine*, that had diſcharged the burnt matter of which theſe little mountains are formed, is ſtill open. I tumbled ſtones down into theſe gulphs and heard the noiſe for a long time after. All the fields round, to a conſiderable diſtance,

diſtance, are covered with large burnt ſtones diſcharged from theſe little volcanoes.

From this place, it is not leſs than five or ſix miles to the great cheſnut-trees, through foreſts growing out of the lava, in ſeveral places almoſt impaſſable. Of theſe trees there are many of an enormous ſize; but the Caſtagno de Cento Cavalli is by much the moſt celebrated. I have often found it marked in an old map of Sicily, publiſhed near an hundred years ago; and in all the maps of Ætna, and its environs, it makes a very conſpicuous figure. I own I was by no means ſtruck with its appearance, as it does not ſeem to be one tree, but a buſh of five large trees growing together. We complained to our guides of the impoſition; when they unanimouſly aſſured us, that by the univerſal tradition and even teſtimony of the country all theſe were once united in one ſtem; that their grand-fathers remembered this, when it was looked upon as the glory of the foreſt, and viſited from all quarters; that for many years paſt it had been reduced to the venerable ruin we beheld. We began to examine it with more attention, and found that there was indeed an appearance as if theſe five trees had really been once united in one. The opening in the middle is at preſent prodigious; and it does indeed require faith to believe, that ſo vaſt a ſpace was once occupied by ſolid timber—But there is no appearance of bark on the inſide of any of the ſtumps, nor on the ſides that are oppoſite to one another. Mr Glover and I meaſured it ſeparately, and brought it exactly

to

to the ſame ſize; viz. 204 feet round. If this was once united in one ſolid ſtem, it muſt with juſtice indeed have been looked upon as a very wonderful phenomenon in the vegetable world, and was deſervedly ſtyled the glory of the foreſt.

I have ſince been told by the Canonico Recupero, an ingenious eccleſiaſtic of this place, that he was at the expence of carrying up peaſants with tools to dig round the Caſtagno de Cento Cavalli, and he aſſures me, upon his honour, that he found all theſe ſtems united below ground, in one root. I alledged that ſo extraordinary an object muſt have been mentioned by many of their writers. He told me that it had, and produced ſeveral examples; Philateo, Carrera, and ſome others. Carrera begs to be excuſed from telling its dimenſions, but ſays, he is ſure there was wood enough in that one tree to build a large palace. Their poet Bagolini too has celebrated a tree of the ſame kind, perhaps the ſame tree*; and Maſſa, one of their moſt eſteemed authors, ſays he has ſeen ſolid oaks upwards of 40 feet round; but adds, that the ſize of the cheſnut trees was beyond belief, the hollow of one of which, he ſays, contained 300 ſheep; and 30 people on horſeback had often been in at a time. I ſhall not pretend to ſay, that this is the ſame tree he means; or whether it ever was one tree or not. There are many

* Supremos inter monteſ monſtroſior omni
Monſtroſi fætum ſtipit's Ætna dedit
Caſtaneam genuit, cujus modo concava cortex
Turmam equitum haud parvam continet, atque greges, &c.

many others that are well deſerving the curi-
ſity of travellers. One of them about a mile an
a half higher on the mountain, is called *Il Ca-
tagno de Galea*; it riſes from one ſolid ſtem to
conſiderable height, after which it branch
out, and is a much finer object than the othe
I meaſured it about two feet from the groun
and found it 76 feet round. There is a thi
called *Il Caſtagno del Nave*, that is pretty near
of the ſame ſize. All theſe grow on a thic
rich ſoil, formed originally, I believe, of aſhe
thrown out by the mountain.

The climate here is much more temperat
than in the firſt region of Ætna, where the ex
ceſſive heats muſt ever prevent a very luxuriant
vegetation. I found the barometer had now
fallen to 26: 5½; which announces an eleva-
tion of very near 4000 feet; equivalent in th
opinion of ſome of the French academicians, t
18 or 20 degrees in the formation of a climate

The vaſt quantity of nitre contained in th
aſhes of Ætna, probably contributes greatly t
increaſe the luxuriance of this vegetation; and
the air too, ſtrongly impregnated with it from
the ſmoke of the volcano, muſt create a conſtant
ſupply of this ſalt, termed by ſome, not withou
reaſon, the food of vegetables.

There is the ruins of a houſe in the inſide o
the great cheſnut-tree which had been built fo
holding the fruit it bears, which is ſtill conſide-
rable; here we dined with excellent appetite,
and being convinced, that it was in vain to at-
tempt getting to the top of the mountain on
that ſide, we began to deſcend; and after a ve-

ry

ry fatiguing journey over old lavas, now become fertile fields and rich vineyards, we arrived about funfet at *Jaci Reale*, where, with no fmall difficulty, we at laft got lodging in a convent of Dominicans.

The laft lava we croffed before our arrival here, is of a vaft extent, I thought we never fhould have had done with it; it certainly is not lefs than fix or feven miles broad, and appears in many places to be of an enormous depth.

When we came near to the fea, I was defirous to fee what form it had affumed in meeting with the water. I went to examine it, and found it had driven back the waves for upwards of a mile, and had formed a large black high promontory, where before it was deep water. This lava, I imagined, from its barrennefs, for it is as yet covered with a very fcanty foil, had run from the mountain only a few ages ago; but was furprifed to be informed by Signior Recupero, the hiftoriographer of Ætna, that this very lava is mentioned by Diodorus Siculus to have burft from Ætna in the time of the fecond Punic war, when Syracufe was befieged by the Romans. A detachment was fent from Taurominum to the relief of the befieged. They were ftopped on their march by this ftream of lava, which having reached the fea before their arrival at the foot of the mountain, had cut off their paffage; and obliged them to return by the back of Ætna, upwards of 100 miles about. His authority for this, he tells me, was taken from infcriptions on Roman monuments found on this lava, and that it was likewife well af-

certained

certained by many of the old Sicilian authors. Now as this is about 2000 years ago, one would have imagined, if lavas have a regular progress in becoming fertile fields, that this must long ago have become at least arable: this however is not the case, and it is as yet only covered with a very scanty vegetation, and incapable of producing either corn or vines. There are indeed pretty large trees growing in the crevices, which are full of a rich earth; but in all probability it will be some hundred years yet, before there is enough of it to render this land of any use to the proprietors.

It is curious to consider, that the surface of this black and barren matter, in process of time, becomes one of the most fertile soils upon earth: But what must be the time to bring it to its utmost perfection, when after 2000 years it is still in most places but a barren rock?—Its progress is possibly as follows. The lava being a very porous substance, easily catches the dust that is carried about by the wind; which, at first, I observe only yields a kind of moss; this rotting, and by degrees increasing the soil, some small meagre vegetables are next produced; which rotting in their turn, are likewise converted into soil. But this progress, I suppose, is often greatly accelerated by showers of ashes from the mountain, as I have observed in some places the richest soil, to the depth of 5 or 6 feet and upwards; and still below that, nothing but rocks of lava. It is in these spots that the trees arrive at such an immense size. Their roots shoot into the crevices of the lava, and lay such hold of

it, that there is no inſtance of the winds tearing them up; though there are many, of its breaking off their largeſt branches. A branch of one of the great cheſnut-trees, where we paſſed yeſterday, has fallen acroſs a deep gully, and formed a very commodious bridge over the rivulet below. The people ſay it was done by St Agatha, the guardian ſaint of the mountain, who has the ſuperintendance of all its operations.

In the loweſt part of the firſt region of Ætna, the harveſt is almoſt over; but in the upper parts of the ſame region, near the confines of the Regione Sylvoſa, it will not begin for ſeveral weeks.

The reapers, as we went along, abuſed us from all quarters, and more excellent blackguards I have never met with; but indeed, our guides were a full match for them. They began as ſoon as we were within hearing, and did not finiſh till we were got quite without reach of their voices, which they extended as much as they could. As it was all in Sicilian, we could make very little of it, but by the interpretation of our guides; however, we could not help admiring the volubility and natural elocution with which they ſpoke. This cuſtom is as old as the time of the Romans, and probably much older, as it is mentioned by Horace, and others of theſe authors. It is ſtill in vogue here as much as ever; the maſters encourage it; they think it gives them ſpirits, and makes the work go on more cheerfully: and I believe they are right, for it is amazing what pleaſure they ſeemed to

rake in it, and what laughing and merriment it occaſioned.

I forgot to mention that we paſſed the ſource of the famous cold river *(il fiume Freddo)*. This is the river ſo celebrated by the poets in the fable of Acis and Galatea. It was here that Acis was ſuppoſed to have been killed by Polyphemus, and the gods out of compaſſion converted him into this river; which, as ſtill retaining the terror inſpired by the dreadful voice of the Cyclops, runs with great rapidity, and about a mile from its ſource throws itſelf into the ſea. It riſes at once out of the earth a large ſtream. Its water is remarkably pure, and ſo extremely cold, that it is reckoned dangerous to drink it; but I am told it has likewiſe a poiſonous quality, which proceeds from its being impregnated with vitriol to ſuch a degree, that cattle have often been killed by it. It never freezes; but, what is remarkable, it is ſaid often to contract a degree of cold greater than that of ice.

Theſe particulars I was informed of by the prieſts at Aci; which place, anciently called Aci Aquileia, and ſeveral others near it, Aci Caſtello, Aci Terra, &c. take their names from the unfortunate ſhepherd Acis.

A little to the eaſt of the river Acis, is the mouth of the river Alcantara, one of the moſt conſiderable in the iſland. It takes its riſe on the north ſide of mount Ætna, and marks out the boundary of the mountain for about 60 miles. Its courſe has been ſtopped in many places by the eruptions of the volcano; ſo that,

ſtrictly

ſtrictly ſpeaking, the ſkirts of Ætna extend much beyond it; though it has generally been conſidered as the boundary. We paſſed it on our way to Piedmonte, over a large bridge built entirely of lava; and near to this the bed of the river is continued for a great way, through one of the moſt remarkable, and probably one of the moſt ancient lavas that ever run from Ætna. In many places the current of the river, which is extremely rapid, has worn down the ſolid lava to the depth of 50 or 60 feet. Recupero, the gentleman I have mentioned, who is engaged in writing the natural hiſtory of Ætna, tells me, he had examined this lava with great attention, and he thinks that its courſe, including all its windings, is not leſs than 40 miles. It iſſued from a mountain on the north ſide of Ætna, and finding ſome vallies that lay on the eaſt, it took its courſe that way, interrupting the Alcantara in many places and at laſt arrived at the ſea not far from the mouth of that river.

The city of Jaci or Aci, and indeed all the towns on this coaſt, are founded on immenſe rocks of lava, heaped one above another, in ſome places to an amazing height; for it appears that theſe flaming torrents, as ſoon as they arrived at the ſea, were hardened into rock, which not yielding any longer to the preſſure of the liquid fire behind; the melted matter continuing to accumulate, formed a dam of fire, which, in a ſhort time run over the ſolid front, pouring a ſecond torrent into the ocean; this was im-

mediately consolidated, and succeeded by a third, and so on.

Many of the places on the coast still retain their ancient names; but the properties ascribed to them by the ancients are now no more. The river Acis, which is now so poisonous, was of old celebrated by the sweetness and salubrity of its waters*; which Theocritus says, were ever held sacred by the Sicilian shepherds.

We were surprised to find that so many places retained the name of this swain, who I imagined had never existed, but in the imagination of the poets: But the Sicilian authors say, that Acis was the name of a king who reigned in this part of the island, in the time of the most remote antiquity; in confirmation of which Massa gives the translation of an inscription found near Aci Castello†. He is said to have been slain in a fit of jealousy by Poliphemus, one of the giants of Ætna, which gave rise to the fable. Anguillara, a Sicilian poet, in relating this story, gives a tremendous idea of the voice of Poliphemus; the passage has been greatly admired.

Tremo

* Quique per Ætnæos Acis petit æquora fines,
Et dulce gratum Nereide persuit unda. SIL. ITAL.

† DIÆ
OGNLÆ, SATURNIÆ, ÆTNÆÆ
DEORUM,
MARTI, FILIÆ, UXORI,
IN PORTU
SEPULCHRUM, TEMPLUM, ET ARCEM
ACIS,
FAUNI FILIUS, PICI NEPOS,
SATURNI PRONEPOS,
[illegible]

"Tremo per troppo horrore Ætna; e Tifeo
Fece maggior la fiamma uſcir del monte;
E Pacchino, e Peloro, e Lilibeo
Quaſi attuffar nel mar l'altera fronte;
Cadde il martel di man nel monte Ætneæo,
All Re di Lenno, a Sterope, e a Bronte;
Fugir fiere & augei di lo ricetto
E ſi ſtrinſe ogni madre il figlio al Petto."

You will obſerve, however, that the Sicilian poet cannot in juſtice claim the entire merit of theſe lines, as they are evidently borrowed from Virgil's deſcription of the ſound of the Fury Alecto's horn, in the 7th Æneid. The laſt line, perhaps the moſt beautiful of the whole, is almoſt word for word,

"Et trepidæ matres preſſere ad pectora natos."

It has been obſerved too, by ſome critics, that even this deſcription of Virgil is not his own, but copied from the account that Apollonius Rhodius gives of the roaring of the dragon that guarded the golden fleece; ſo that you ſee there is nothing new under the ſun. Rhodius probably ſtole it from ſomebody elſe, and ſo on. Poets have ever been the greateſt of all thieves; and happy it is that poetical theft is no felony; otherwiſe, I am afraid, Parnaſſus would have been but thinly peopled.

Farewel; to-morrow I ſhall endeavour to bring you up with us; for at preſent you will pleaſe to obſerve, that you have got no farther than the city of Jaci; and have ſtill many ex-

tinguiſhed volcanoes to paſs before your arrival here.

Ever yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

Catania, May 25th.

THE road from Jaci to this city is entirely over lava, and conſequently very fatiguing and troubleſome. Within a few miles of this place, we counted eight mountains formed by eruption, with every one its crater, from whence the burnt matter was diſcharged. Some of theſe are very high, and of a great compaſs. It appears evidently, that the eruptions of mount Ætna have formed the whole of the coaſt, and in many places have driven back the ſea for ſeveral miles from its ancient boundary. The account the Sicilian authors give of the conflict betwixt theſe two adverſe elements is truly tremendous; and in relating it, they ſeem to have been ſhaken with horror. Conceive the front of a torrent of fire, ten miles in breadth, and heaped up to an enormous height, rolling down the mountain, and pouring its flames into the ocean! The noiſe, they aſſure us, is infinitely more dreadful than the loudeſt thunder; and is heard through the whole country to an immenſe diſtance. The water ſeemed to retire and diminiſh before the fire, and to confeſs its ſuperiority; yielding up its poſſeſſions, and contracting its banks, to make room for its imperi-

ous

ous maſter, who commands it: "Thus far ſhalt thou come, and no farther."—The clouds of ſalt vapour darken the face of the ſun, covering up this ſcene, under a veil of horror and of night; and laying waſte every field and vineyard in theſe regions of the iſland. The whole fiſh on the coaſt are deſtroyed, the colour of the ſea itſelf is changed, and the tranſparency of its waters loſt for many months.

There are three rocks of lava at ſome little diſtance from ſhore, which Pliny takes frequent notice of, and calls them the Three Cyclops. It is pretty ſingular, that they are ſtill diſtinguiſhed by the ſame name.

The fate of Catania has been very remarkable, and will ever appear fabulous. It is ſituated immediately at the foot of this great volcano, and has been ſeveral times deſtroyed by it: That indeed is not extraordinary; it would have been much more ſo had it eſcaped; but what I am going to relate, is a ſingularity that probably never happened to any city but itſelf. It was always in great want of a port, till by an eruption in the 16th century, and no doubt, by the interpoſition of St Agatha, what was denied them by nature, they received from the generoſity of the mountain. A ſtream of lava, running into the ſea, formed a mole which no expence could have furniſhed them. This laſted for ſome time a ſafe and commodious harbour, till at laſt, by a ſubſequent eruption, it was entirely filled up and demoliſhed; ſo that probably the poor ſaint had ſunk much in her credit; for at this unfortunate period, her miraculous

raculous veil, looked upon as the greateſt treaſure of Catania, and eſteemed an infallible remedy againſt earthquakes and volcanoes, ſeems to have loſt its virtue. The torrent burſt over the walls, ſweeping away the images of every ſaint that were placed there to oppoſe it; and laying waſte great part of this beautiful city, poured into the ſea. However, the people ſay, that at that time they had given their ſaint juſt provocation, but that ſhe had long ago been reconciled to them; and has promiſed never to ſuffer the mountain to get the better of them for the future. Many of them are ſo thoroughly convinced of this (for they are extremely ſuperſtitious) that I really believe if the lava were at their walls, they would not be at the pains to remove their effects. Neither is it the veil of St Agatha alone, that they think poſſeſſed of this wonderful dominion over the mountain; but every thing that has touched that piece of ſacred attire, they ſuppoſe is impregnated in a leſſer degree with the ſame miraculous properties. Thus there are a number of little bits of cotton and linen fixed to the veil; which, after being bleſſed by the biſhop, are ſuppoſed to acquire power enough to ſave any perſon's houſe or garden; and wherever this expedient has failed, it is always aſcribed to the want of faith of the perſon, not any want of efficacy in the veil. However, they tell you many ſtories of theſe bits of cotton being fixed to the walls of houſes and vineyards, and preſerving them entirely from the conflagration.

On our arrival at Catania, we were amazed to

to find, that in so noble and beautiful a city, there was no such thing as an inn. Our guides, indeed, conducted us to a house they called such; but it was so wretchedly mean and dirty, that we were obliged to look out for other lodgings; and by the affistance of the Canonico Recupero, for whom we had letters, we soon found ourselves comfortably lodged in a convent. The prince of Biscaris (the governor of the place) a person of very great merit and distinction, returned our visit this forenoon, and made us the most obliging offers.

Signior Recupero, who obligingly engages to be our Cicerone, has shewn us some curious remains of antiquity; but they have been all so shaken and shattered by the mountain, that hardly any thing is to be found entire.

Near to a vault, which is now 30 feet below ground, and has probably been a burial-place, there is a draw well, where there are several strata of lavas, with earth to a considerable thickness over the surface of each stratum. Recupero has made use of this as an argument to prove the great antiquity of the eruptions of his mountain. For as it requires two thousand years or upwards to form a scanty soil on the surface of a lava, there must have been more than that space of time betwixt each of the eruptions which have formed these strata. But what shall we say of a pit they sunk near to Jaci, of a great depth? They pierced through seven distinct lavas one under the other, the surfaces of which were parallel and most of them covered with a thick bed of rich earth. Now, says he, the eruption

ruption which formed the loweſt of theſe lavas, if we may be allowed to reaſon from analogy, muſt have flowed from the mountain at leaſt 14,000 years ago.

Recupero tells me he is exceedingly embarraſſed by theſe diſcoveries in writing the hiſtory of the mountain.—That Moſes hangs like a dead weight upon him, and blunts all his zeal for inquiry; for that really he has not the conſcience to make his mountain ſo young as that prophet makes the world.—What do you think of theſe ſentiments from a Roman Catholic divine?—The biſhop, who is ſtrenuouſly orthodox—for it is an excellent ſee—has already warned him to be upon his guard, and not to pretend to be a better natural hiſtorian than Moſes; nor to preſume to urge any thing that may in the ſmalleſt degree be deemed contradictory to his ſacred authority. Adieu.

Ever yours.

LETTER VIII.

Catania, May 26th.

THIS morning we went to ſee the houſe and muſeum of the prince of Biſcaris; which in antiques, is inferior to none I have ever ſeen, except that of the king of Naples at Portici. What adds greatly to the value of theſe is, that the prince himſelf has had the ſatisfaction of ſeeing the moſt of them brought to light. He has dug them out of the ruins of the ancient

ancient theatre of Catania, at an incredible expence; but happily his pains have been amply repaid, by the number and variety of curious objects he has discovered. It would be endless to enter into an enumeration of them; even during our short stay, we had the satisfaction of seeing part of a rich Corinthian cornice, and several pieces of statues, produced again to the light, after lying for so many ages in darkness and oblivion. His collection of medals, cameios, and intaglios is likewise very princely, and so are the articles in natural history: but the polite and amiable behaviour of the owner, gives more pleasure than all his curiosities. He did not, ostentatiously, like the prince of Villa Franca, tell us that his house and carriages were at our command; but without any hint being given of it, we found his coach waiting at our door; and we shall probably be obliged to make use of it during our stay. His family consists of the princess his wife, a son, and a daughter, who seem to emulate each other in benignity. They put me in mind of some happy families I have seen in our own country, but resemble nothing we have met with on the continent. He is just now building a curious villa on a promontory formed by the lava of 1669. The spot where the house stands was formerly at least 50 feet deep of water; and the height of the lava above the present level of the sea, is not less than 50 more.

This afternoon I walked out alone to examine the capricious forms and singular appearances that this destructive branch has assumed in

in laying waſte the country. I had not gone far when I ſpied a magnificent building at ſome diſtance, which ſeemed to ſtand on the higheſt part of it. My curioſity led me on, as I had heard no mention of any place on this ſide of the city. On entering the great gate, my ſurpriſe was a good deal increaſed on obſerving a facade almoſt equal to that of Verſailles; a noble ſtair-caſe of white marble, and every thing that announced a royal magnificence. I had never heard that the kings of Sicily had a palace at Catania, and yet I could not account for what I ſaw in any other way. I thought the vaſt front before me had been the whole of the palace; but conceive my amazement, when on turning the corner, I found another front of equal greatneſs; and diſcovered that what I had ſeen was only one ſide of a ſquare.

I was no longer in doubt, well knowing that the church alone could be miſtreſs of ſuch magnificence. I haſtened home to communicate this diſcovery to my friends; when I found the Canonico Recupero already with them. He abuſed me exceedingly for preſuming to go out without our Cicerone, and declared he had never been ſo much diſappointed in his life; as he had come on purpoſe to carry us there, and to enjoy our ſurpriſe and aſtoniſhment. He then told us, that it was no other than a convent of fat Benedictine monks; who were determined to make ſure of a paradiſe, at leaſt in this world, if not in the other. He added, that they were worth about 15,000l. a year; an immenſe ſum indeed for this country.

We

We went with Recupero to pay our respects to these sons of humility, temperance, and mortification; and we must own, they received and entertained us with great civility and politeness, and even without ostentation. Their museum is little inferior to that of the prince of Biscaris, and the apartments that contain it are much more magnificent. But their garden is the greatest curiosity: Although it be formed on the rugged and barren surface of the lava, it has a variety and a neatness seldom to be met with. The walks are broad, and paved with flints: and the trees and hedges (which by the by are in a bad taste, and cut into a number of ridiculous shapes) thrive exceedingly. The whole soil must have been brought from a great distance, as the surface of this lava only (150 years old) is as hard and bare as a piece of iron. The church belonging to this convent, if finished, would be one of the finest in Europe; but as it is founded on the surface of the porous and brittle lava, part of the foundation has given way to the pressure of so huge a fabric; and several of the large arches that were intended to form the different chapels, have already fallen down. Only the west limb of the cross (not a fifth of the whole) is finished; and even this alone makes a very fine church. Here they have the finest organ I ever heard, even superior, I think, to that at Harlem.

We went next to examine where the lava had scaled the walls of Catania. It must have been a noble sight. The walls are 64 palms high, (near 60 feet) and of a great strength; otherwise

wiſe they muſt have been borne down by the force of the flaming matter which roſe over this height, and ſeems to have mounted conſiderably above the top of the wall before it made its entry; at laſt it came down, ſweeping before it every ſaint in the calendar, who were drawn up in order of battle on purpoſe to oppoſe its paſſage; and marching on in triumph, annihilated in a manner, every object that dared to oppoſe it. Amongſt other things, it covered up ſome fine fountains; one of which was ſo much eſteemed, that they have at a great expence pierced through the lava, and have now recovered their favourite ſpring. This excavation is a very curious work, and worthy of the attention of travellers.

Catania is looked upon as one of the moſt ancient cities in the iſland, or indeed in the world.—Their legends bear, that it was founded by the Cyclops, or giants of Ætna, ſuppoſed to have been the firſt inhabitants of Sicily after the deluge: and ſome of the Sicilian writers pretend that it was built by Deucalion and Pyrrha as ſoon as the waters ſubſided, and they had got down again to the foot of the mountain. Its ancient name was Catetna, or the city of Ætna.

It is now reckoned the third city in the kingdom: though ſince Meſſina was deſtroyed by the plague, it may be well conſidered as the ſecond. It contains upwards of 30,000 inhabitants; has an univerſity, the only one in the iſland; and a biſhopric. The biſhop's revenues are conſiderable, and ariſe principally from the ſale of the ſnow on mount Ætna. One ſmall portion of which, lying on the north of the mountain,

mountain, is ſaid to bring him upwards of a 1000l. a year; for Ætna furniſhes ſnow and ice not only to the whole iſland of Sicily, but likewiſe to Malta, and a great part of Italy, and makes a very conſiderable branch of commerce; for even the peaſants in theſe hot countries regale themſelves with ices during the ſummer heats; and there is no entertainment given by the nobility, of which theſe do not always make a principal part: a famine of ſnow, they themſelves ſay, would be more grievous, than a famine either of corn or wine. It is a common obſervation amongſt them, that without the ſnows of mount Ætna, their iſland could not be inhabited; ſo eſſential has this article of luxury become to them. But Ætna not only keeps them cool in ſummer, but likewiſe keeps them warm in winter; the fuel for the greateſt part of this iſland being carried from the immenſe and inexhauſtible foreſts of this volcano, and conſtitutes too, a very large branch of commerce.—But this amazing mountain perpetually carries me away from my ſubject; I was ſpeaking of this city.—What of it was ſpared by the eruption 1669, was totally ruined by the fatal earthquake 1693; when the greateſt part of its inhabitants were buried under the walls of their houſes and churches. Yet, after ſuch repeated and ſuch diſmal diſaſters, ſo ſtrange is their infatuation, that they could never be prevailed upon to change their ſituation. The whole city was ſoon rebuilt, after a new and an elegant plan, and is now much handſomer than ever. There is ſcarce any doubt, that in ſome future

commotion of the mountain, it will be again laid in afhes. But at prefent they are in perfect fecurity: The Virgin and St Agatha have both engaged to protect them; and under their banner they hold Ætna, with all the devils it contains, at defiance.

There are many remains of antiquity in this city, but indeed moft of them are in a very ruinous ftate. One of the moft remarkable is an elephant of lava, with an obelifk of Egyptian granite on his back. There are likewife confiderable remains of a great theatre, befides the one belonging to the prince of Bifcaris; a large bath almoft entire; the ruins of the great aqueduct, 18 miles long; the ruins of feveral temples, one of Ceres, another of Vulcan: The church called *Bocca di Fuoco* was likewife a temple. But the moft entire of all, is a fmall rotundo, which, as well as the pantheon at Rome, and fome others to be met with in Italy, in my opinion, demonftrates that form to be the moft durable of any.

It has now been purged and purified from all the infection contracted from the heathen rites, and become a chriftian church, dedicated to the bleffed Virgin: who has long been conftituted univerfal legatee, and executrix to all the ancient goddeffes, celeftial, terreftrial, and infernal: and, indeed, little more than the names are changed, the things continuing pretty much the fame as ever.—The Catholics themfelves do not attend to it: but it is not a little curious to confider, how fmall is the deviation in almoft every article of their prefent rites from

from thoſe of the ancients. I have ſomewhere ſeen an obſervation, which ſeems to be a juſt one: That during the long reign of heatheniſm ſuperſtition had altogether exhauſted her talent for invention: ſo that when a ſuperſtitious ſpirit ſeized chriſtians, they were under a neceſſity of borrowing from their predeceſſors, and imitating ſome part of their idolatry. This appears to be ſtrictly the caſe. I took notice of it to Signior R——, who is not the moſt zealous ſectary in the world, and who frankly owned the truth of this obſervation.

In ſome places the very ſame images ſtill remain: They have only chriſtened them; and what was Venus or Proſerpine, is now Mary Magdalene, or the Virgin. The ſame ceremonies are daily performed before theſe images; in the ſame language, and nearly in the ſame manner. The ſaints are perpetually coming down in perſon, and working miracles, as the heathen gods did of old. The walls of the temples are covered with the vows of pilgrims as they were formerly. The holy water, which was held in ſuch deteſtation by the firſt chriſtians, is again revered, and ſprinkled about with the ſame devotion as in the time of Paganiſm. The ſame incenſe is burnt, by prieſts arrayed in the ſame manner, with the ſame grimaces, and genu-flections, before the ſame images, and in the ſame temples too. In ſhort, ſo nearly do the rites coincide, that were the pagan high prieſt to come back, and re-aſſume his functions, he would only have to learn a few new names: to get the Maſs, the Paters, and the

the Aves by heart; which would be much eaſier to him, as they are in a language he underſtands, but which his modern ſucceſſors are often ignorant of. Some things, to be ſure, would puzzle him; and he would ſwear that all the myſteries of Elyſius were nothing to the amazing myſtery of tranſubſtantiation; the only one that ever attempted to ſet both our underſtanding and our ſenſes at defiance, and baffles equally all the faculties both of the ſoul and body.—He would, likewiſe, be a good deal at a loſs to account for the ſtrange metamorphoſis of ſome of his old friends. That (he would ſay) I can well remember, was the ſtatue of Venus Meterix, and was only worſhipped by the looſe and voluptuous. She ſeems to be wonderfully improved ſince you made her a chriſtian; for I find ſhe is now become the great protectreſs of chaſtity and virtue.—Juno too, who was ſo implacable and ſo revengeful, you have ſoftened down into a very moderate ſort of deity; for I obſerve you addreſs her with as little fear or ceremony as any of the reſt of them; I wiſh you would make the Furies chriſtians too, for ſurely they would be much the better.—But obſerving the figure of St Anthony, he would exclaim with aſtoniſhment—But what do I behold!—Jupiter, the ſovereign of gods and men, with a ragged cloak over his ſhoulders! What a humiliating ſpectacle! Well do I remember, with what awe we went before that once reſpectable image. But what has become of the thunderbolt, which he held in his hand to chaſtiſe the world; and what is that he has got in its

its place? His conductor would tell him, that it was only a piece of rope, with knots upon it, to chastise himself; adding, that he was now doing penance for his long usurpation; and that the thunder had long ago been put into better hands. —However, he would soon find, that even these saints sometimes change their names, according to the enthusiastic caprice of the people; and from this versatility, he would still be in hopes, in process of time, to see his friend reassume his bolt and his dignity.

Do you remember old Huet—the greatest of all originals? One day, as he passed the statue of Jupiter in the capitol, he pulled off his hat, and made him a bow.—A jacobite gentleman who observed it, asked him why he paid so much respect to the old gentleman.—For the same reason, replied Huet, that you pay so much to the Pretender. Besides, added he, I think there is rather a greater probability that his turn will come round again, than that of your hero; I shall therefore endeavour to keep well with him and hope he will never forget that I took notice of him in the time of his adversity.

Indeed, within the course of my own observation, I can recollect some of the most capital saints in the calendar, who have been disgraced by the people, and new names given to their statues. When we were in Portugal last war, the people of Castel Branco were so enraged at St Antonio, for allowing the Spaniards to plunder their town, contrary, as they affirmed, to his express agreement with them, that they broke many of his statues to pieces; and one that

that had been more revered than the reſt, they took the head off, and clapped on one of St Francis in its place; whoſe name the ſtatue ever afterwards retained. Even the great St Janarius himſelf, I am told, was in imminent danger during the laſt famine at Naples. A Swiſs gentleman aſſured me, that he had heard them load him with abuſe and invective; and declared point-blank, that if he did not procure them corn by ſuch a time, he ſhould no longer be their ſaint. However, ſuch inſtances are but rare; and in general the poor Catholics are fully indemnified for theſe ſudden fits of paſſion and reſentment, for the full perſuaſion of the immediate preſence and protection of their beloved patrons.

I have obſerved with pleaſure, that glow of gratitude and affection that has animated their countenances; and am perſuaded that the warmth of the enthuſiaſtic devotion they often feel before their favourite ſaints, particularly their female ones, muſt have ſomething extremely delightful in it: reſembling, perhaps, the pure and delicate ſenſations of the moſt reſpectful love. I own I have ſometimes envied them in their feelings; and in my heart curſed the pride of reaſon and philoſophy, with all its cool and taſteleſs triumphs, that lulls into a kind of ſtoical apathy theſe moſt exquiſite ſenſations of the ſoul. Who would not chooſe to be deceived, when the deception raiſes in him theſe delicious paſſions, that are ſo worthy of the human heart; and for which, of all others, it ſeems to be the moſt fitted? But if once you

have ſteeled it over with the hard and impenetrable temper of philoſophy; the fine-ſpun threads of weakneſs and affection that were ſo pliable, and ſo eaſily tied, become hard and inflexible; and for ever loſe that delicate tone of ſenſibility that put them into a kind of uniſon and vibration with every object around us: For it is certainly true, what has been ſaid of one part of our ſpecies, and may almoſt with equal juſtice be applied to the whole,

"That to their weakneſs half their charms we owe."

I remember Doctor Tiſſot told me, he had a patient that actually died for love of Chriſt; and when in the laſt extremity, ſeemed ſtill to enjoy the greateſt happineſs; calling upon him with all the fondneſs of the moſt enthuſiaſtic paſſion. And from what I have often obſerved before the ſtatues of the Virgin and St Agatha, I am perſuaded, they have many inamoratos that would willingly lay down their lives for them.

Now, pray don't you think too, that this perſonal kind of worſhip is much better adapted to the capacities of the vulgar, than the more pure and ſublime modes of it, which would only diſtract and confound their ſimple underſtandings, unaccuſtomed to ſpeculation; and that certainly require ſomething groſs and material, ſome object of ſenſe to fix their attention?—This even ſeems to have been the opinion of the ſacred writers, who often repreſent God under ſome material form.

Were you to attempt to give a country-fellow

an idea of the deity; were you to tell him of a being that is immaterial, and yet whofe effence penetrates all matter; who has exifted from all eternity, and whofe extenfion is equally boundlefs with his duration; who fills and pervades millions of worlds, and animates every object they contain; and who, in the fublime language of our poet,

"Tho' chang'd thro' all, is yet in all the fame,
"Great in th' earth, as in th' ætherial frame:
"Warms in the fun, refrefhes in the breeze,
"Glows in the ftars, and bloffoms in the trees;
"Lives thro' all life, extends thro' all extent;
"Spreads undivided, operates unfpent.
"To him no high, no low, no great, no fmall;
"He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all."

Now, what do you imagine he would think of fuch a being? I am afraid his underftanding would be fo bewildered, that he could not think at all. But fet up before him the figure of a fine woman, with a beautiful child in her arms, the moft interefting object in nature; and tell him fhe can procure him every thing he wants; he knows perfectly well what he is about; feels himfelf animated by the object, and prays to her with all his might.

Adieu.—We are going to be very bufy; and are preparing every thing for one of the greateft objects of our expedition; the examination of mount Ætna. Indeed, we have received but bad encouragement; and are beginning to doubt of the poffibility of fuccefs. Recupero tells us, that the feafon is not far enough advanced yet, by

by ſome months; and that he does not think it will be poſſible to get near the ſummit of the mountain. The laſt winter, he ſays, was ſo uncommonly ſevere, that the circle of ſnow extended much nearer the foot of the mountain than uſual; that although the circle is now greatly contracted, it ſtill extends nine or ten miles below the crater.—He adviſes us to return this way in the month of Auguſt; and, if poſſible, make Ætna the laſt part of our expedition. If we do not ſucceed to-morrow, we ſhall probably follow his advice; but we are determined to make a bold puſh for it. The weather is the moſt favourable that can be imagined: Here is a delightful evening; and by the ſtar-light we can obſerve the ſmoke rolling down the ſide of the mountain like a vaſt torrent. Recupero ſays, this is a ſure indication of the violence of the cold in theſe exalted regions of the atmoſphere, which condenſes the vapour, and makes it fall down, the moment it iſſues out of the crater. He adviſes us, by all means, to provide plenty of *liquors*, warm fur cloaks, and hatchets to cut wood; as we ſhall probably be obliged to paſs the night in the open air, in a climate he aſſures us, as cold as that of Greenland. It is very ſingular if this be true; for at preſent we are melting with heat, in thin ſuits of taffeta. Adieu. You ſhall know it all on our return, if we do not ſhare the fate of Empedocles.

Ever yours.

LETTER

LETTER IX.

Catania, May 29th.

ON the 27th, by day break, we ſet off to viſit mount Ætna, that venerable and reſpectable father of mountains. His baſe, and his immenſe declivities, are covered with a numerous progeny of his own; for every great eruption produces a new mountain; and perhaps, by the number of theſe, better than by any other method, the number of eruptions, and the age of Ætna itſelf, might be aſcertained.

The whole mountain is divided into three diſtinct regions, called *La Regione Culta* or *Piedmonteſe*, The Fertile Region; *La Regione Sylvoſa*, or *Nemoroſa*, The Woody Region; and *La Regione Deſerta*, or *Scoperta*, the Barren Region.

Theſe three are as different, both in climate and productions, as the three zones of the earth; and perhaps, with equal propriety, might have been ſtyled the Torrid, the Temperate, and the Frigid zone. The firſt region ſurrounds the mountain, and conſtitutes the moſt fertile country in the world on all ſides of it, to the extent of about fourteen or fifteen miles, where the woody region begins. It is compoſed almoſt entirely of lava, which, after a number of ages, is at laſt converted into the moſt fertile of all ſoils.

At Nicoloſi, which is twelve miles up the mountain, we found the barometer at 27 : 1½; at Catania it ſtood at 29 : 8½; although the former

former elevation is not very great, probably not exceeding 3000 feet, yet the climate was totally changed. At Catania, the harveſt was entirely over, and the heats were inſupportable; here they were moderate, and in many places the corn is as yet green. The road for theſe twelve miles is the worſt I ever travelled; entirely over old lavas and the mouths of extinguiſhed volcanoes, now converted into corn fields, vineyards, and orchards.

The fruit of this region is reckoned the fineſt in Sicily, particularly the figs, of which they have a great variety. One of theſe of a very large ſize, eſteemed ſuperior in flavour to all the reſt, they pretend is peculiar to Ætna.

The lavas, which as I have already ſaid form this region of the mountain, take their riſe from an infinite number of the moſt beautiful little mountains on earth, which are every where ſcattered on the immenſe declivity of Ætna. Theſe are all of a regular figure; either that of a cone, or a ſemiſphere; and all but a very few are covered with beautiful trees, and the richeſt verdure: Every eruption generally forms one of theſe mountains. As the great crater of Ætna itſelf is raiſed to ſuch an enormous height above the lower regions of the mountain, it is not poſſible, that the internal fire raging for a vent, even round the baſe, and no doubt vaſtly below it, ſhould be carried to the height of twelve or thirteen thouſand feet, for probably ſo high is the ſummit of Ætna. It has therefore generally happened, that after ſhaking the

mountain and its neighbourhood for ſome time, it at laſt burſts open its ſide, and this is called an eruption. At firſt it only ſends forth a thick ſmoke and ſhowers of aſhes, that lay waſte the adjacent country: Theſe are ſoon followed by red hot ſtones, and rocks of a great ſize, thrown to an immenſe height in the air. The fall of theſe ſtones, together with the quantities of aſhes diſcharged at the ſame time, at laſt form the ſpherical and conical mountains I have mentioned. Sometimes this proceſs is finiſhed in the courſe of a few days, ſometimes it laſts for months, which was the caſe in the great eruption 1669. In that caſe, the mountain formed is of a great ſize; ſome of them are not leſs than ſeven or eight miles round and upwards of 1000 feet in perpendicular height; others are not more than two or three miles round, and 3 or 400 feet high.

After the new mountain is formed, the lava generally burſts out from its lower ſide; and bearing every thing before it, is for the moſt part terminated by the ſea. This is the common progreſs of an eruption; however it ſometimes happens, though rarely, that the lava burſts at once from the ſide of the mountain, without all theſe attending circumſtances; and this is commonly the caſe with the eruptions of Veſuvius, where the elevation being ſo much ſmaller, the melted matter is generally carried up into the crater of the mountain, which then exhibits the phenomena I have deſcribed; diſcharging ſhowers of ſtones and aſhes from the mouth

mouth of the volcano, without forming any new mountain, but only adding confiderably to the height of the old one; till at laft the lava, rifing near the fummit, burfts the fide of the crater, and the eruption is declared. This has literally been the cafe with two eruptions I have been an attentive witnefs of in that mountain; but Ætna is upon a much larger fcale, and one crater is not enough to give vent to fuch oceans of liquid fire.

Recupero affures me, he faw in an eruption of that mountain large rocks of fire difcharged to the height of fome thoufand feet, with a noife much more terrible than that of thunder. He meafured from the time of their greateft elevation till they reached the ground, and found they took twenty-one feconds to defcend; which, according to the rule of the fpaces, being as the fquares of the times, amounts, I think, to upwards of 7000 feet. A moft aftonifhing height furely, and requiring a force of projection beyond what we have any conception of. I meafured the height of the explofions of Vefuvius by the fame rule, and never obferved any of the ftones thrown from it to take more than nine feconds to defcend, which fhews they had rifen to little more than 1200 feet.

Our landlord at Nicolofi gave us an account of the fingular fate of the beautiful country near Hybla, at no great diftance from hence. It was fo celebrated for its fertility, and particularly for its honey, that it was called Mel Paffi, till it was overwhelmed by the lava of

 Ætna;

Ætna; and having then become totally barren, by a kind of pun its name was changed to Mal Paſſi. In a ſecond eruption, by a ſhower of aſhes from the mountain, it ſoon re-aſſumed its ancient beauty and fertility, and for many years was called Bel Paſſi. Laſt of all, the unfortunate æra of 1669, it was again laid under an ocean of fire, and reduced to the moſt wretched ſterility, ſince which time it is known again by its ſecond appellation of Mal Paſſi. However, the lava, in its courſe over this beautiful little country, has left ſeveral little iſlands or hillocks; juſt enough to ſhew what it formerly was. Theſe make a ſingular appearance, in all the bloom of the moſt luxuriant vegetation, ſurrounded and rendered almoſt inacceſſible by large fields of black and rugged lava. The mountain from whence the firſt eruption iſſued, that covered Mel Paſſi, is known by the name of Monpelieri: I was ſtruck with its beautiful appearance, at a diſtance, and could not reſiſt the deſire I had of examining it minutely, as well as of obſerving the effects of the two eruptions that overwhelmed this celebrated country.

Monpelieri is rather of a ſpherical than a conical ſhape, and does not riſe in perpendicular height above three hundred feet, but it is ſo perfectly regular on every ſide, and ſo richly overſpread with fruits and flowers, that I could not leave ſo heavenly a ſpot without the greateſt regret. Its cup or crater is large in proportion to the mountain, and is as exactly hollowed out as the beſt made bowl. I walked quite round

its

its outward edge, and think the circumference muſt be ſomewhat more than a mile.

This mountain was formed by the firſt eruption that deſtroyed the country of Mel Paſſi, and is of a very old date. It buried a great number of villages and country houſes; and particularly two noble churches, which are more regretted than all the reſt, on account of three ſtatues, reckoned at that time the moſt perfect in the iſland. They have attempted, but in vain, to recover them; as the ſpot where the churches ſtood could never be juſtly aſcertained. Indeed it is impoſſible it ſhould; for theſe churches were built of lava, which it is well known is immediately melted, when it comes into contact with a torrent of new erupted matter: And Maſſa ſays, that in ſome eruptions of Ætna, the lava has poured down with ſuch a ſudden impetuoſity, that in the courſe of a few hours, churches, palaces and villages, have been entirely melted down, and the whole run off in fuſion, without leaving the leaſt mark of their former exiſtence. But if the lava has had any conſiderable time to cool, this ſingular effect never happens.

The great eruption of 1669, after ſhaking the whole country around for four months, and forming a very large mountain of ſtones and aſhes, burſt out about half a mile above Monpelieri, and deſcending like a torrent, bore directly againſt the middle of the mountain, and (they pretend) perforated it from ſide to ſide: this however, I doubt, as it muſt have broken

the

the regular form of the mountain, which is not the caſe. But certain it is, that it pierced to a great depth. The lava then divided into two branches; and ſurrounding this mountain, joined again on its ſouth ſide; and laying waſte the whole country betwixt that and Catania, ſcaled the walls of that city, and poured its flaming torrent into the ocean. In its way, it is ſaid to have deſtroyed the poſſeſſions of near 30,000 people, and reduced them to beggary. It formed ſeveral hills where there were formerly vallies, and filled up a large lake, of which there is not now the leaſt veſtige to be ſeen.

As the events of this eruption are better known than any other, they tell a great many ſingular ſtories of it; one of which, however incredible it may appear, is well aſcertained. A vineyard, belonging to a convent of Jeſuits, lay directly on its way. This vineyard was formed on an ancient lava, probably a thin one, with a number of caverns and crevices under it. The liquid lava entering into theſe caverns, ſoon filled them up, and by degrees bore up the vineyard; and the Jeſuits, who every moment expected to ſee it buried, beheld with amazement the whole field begin to move off. It was carried on the ſurface of the lava to a conſiderable diſtance; and though the greateſt part was deſtroyed, yet ſome of it remains to this day.

We went to examine the mouth from whence the dreadful torrent iſſued; and were ſurpriſed to find it only a ſmall hole, of about three or four yards diameter. The mountain from whence it

it ſprung, I think is little leſs than the conical part of Veſuvius.

There is a vaſt cavern on the oppoſite ſide of it, where people go to ſhoot wild pigeons, which breed there in great abundance. The innermoſt parts of this cavern are ſo very diſmal and gloomy, that our landlord told us ſome people had loſt their ſenſes from having advanced too far, imagining they ſaw devils and the ſpirits of the damned; for it is ſtill very generally believed here, that Ætna is the mouth of hell.

We found a degree of wildneſs and ferocity in the inhabitants of this mountain, that I have not obſerved any where elſe. It put me in mind of an obſervation the Padre della Torre (the hiſtoriographer of mount Veſuvius) told me he had often made in the confines of Naples; that in the places where the air is moſt impregnated with ſulphur and hot exhalations, the people were always moſt wicked and vicious. Whatever truth there may be in the obſervation, the people about Nicoloſi at leaſt ſeem to confirm it. The whole village flocked round us, and the women in particular abuſed us exceedingly; the cauſe of which we at laſt found was, that F——'s blooming complexion and white ſkin had made them take him for one of their own ſex. They made a great clamour, and it was with difficulty we could appeaſe them. The perſon, whom Recupero had appointed to accompany us, known by the name of the Cyclops, (the man in the iſland that is beſt acquainted with mount Ætna) was ordered by them not to go with us; and if we had not at laſt

last obtained their consent by soothing and flattery, the best method with women, he durst not have disobeyed them. At first we had been obliged to shut the gate of the court, they were so very noisy and tumultuous; but when our landlord (a priest), for whom we had letters from Catania, assured them that we were Christians, and came with no bad intentions, they became more moderate, and we ventured out amongst them.—This confidence soon acquired theirs; and in a short time we became good friends, and had a great deal of conversation.

It was with much difficulty I could persuade them that we were not come to search for hidden treasures, a great quantity of which they believe is to be found in Monpelieri; and when I went to that mountain they were then fully convinced that this was our intention. Two of the men followed me, and kept a close eye on every step that I took; and when I lifted any bit of lava or pumice. they came running up, thinking it was something very precious; but when they observed they were only bits of stone, and that I put them into my pocket, they laughed heartily, talking to one another in their mountain jargon, which is unintelligible even to Italians. However, as most of them speak Italian so as to be understood, they asked me what I was going to make of these bits of stone? I told them they were of a great value in our country; that the people there had a way of making gold of them: At this they both seemed surprised, and spoke again in their tongue. However, I found they did not believe me; one

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of them told me, if that had been true, I certainly would not have been ſo ready in telling it: But, ſaid he, if it is ſo, we will ſerve you for ever, if you will teach us that art; for then we ſhall be the richeſt people on earth. I aſſured them that I had not yet learned it myſelf, and that it was a ſecret known only to a very few. They were likewiſe a good deal ſurpriſed to ſee me pull out of my pocket a magnetical needle and a ſmall electrometer, which I had prepared at Catania to examine the electrical ſtate of the air; and I was afraid they ſhould have taken me for a conjuror (which you know already happened amongſt the Appenines), but luckily that idea did not ſtrike them.

On our way back to Nicoloſi we were joined by three or four more, with their wives. I began to be a little afraid of myſelf, leſt they ſhould inſiſt on knowing the ſecret. However, I took out my bits of lava, and told them they were at their ſervice, if they had any occaſion for them. But they refuſed them, ſaying, they wiſhed to the Virgin, and St Agatha, that I could take away the whole of it; as it had ruined the fineſt country in all Sicily.

One fellow who aſſumed an air of ſuperior wiſdom and dignity to the reſt, made them form a circle round him, and began to interrogate me with great gravity and compoſure. It was with difficulty I could keep my countenance; but as I was alone with them, at ſome diſtance from the village, I was afraid of offending them. He deſired me to anſwer him with truth and preciſion, what were the real motives

motives of our coming ſo fatiguing and diſagreeable a journey? I told him, on my word, that we had no other motive but curioſity to examine mount Ætna. On which, laughing, to one another with great contempt; *Un bel ragione queſto, non e vero,* ſaid they; (a very pretty reaſon truly.) The old fellow then aſked me what country we were of. I told him, we were *Ingleſe*. *E dove? loro paeſe,* ſaid he; whereabouts does their country lie? I told him it was a great way off, on the other ſide of the world. *Da vero,* ſaid the fellow—*e credono in Chriſto quelli Ingleſe?*—I told him (laughing) that they did. Ah, ſaid he, ſhaking his head, *mipare chenon credono troppo.*—One of the company then obſerved, that he remembered ſeveral of theſe Ingleſe, that, at different times, had paid viſits to mount Ætna, and that they never could find out their motive; but that he recollected very well to have heard many of their old people ſay, that the Ingleſe had a queen that had burnt in the mountain for many years paſt; and that they ſuppoſed theſe viſits were made from ſome devotion or reſpect to her memory. I aſſured them that the Ingleſe had but too little reſpect for their queens when they were alive, but that they never troubled themſelves about them after they were dead: however, as all the others confirmed this teſtimony, I thought it was ſafeſt to ſay little againſt it; but I was extremely curious to know who this queen might be. They alledged that I knew much better than they; but added, that her name was Anna.

I could not conceive what queen Anne had

done to bring her there; and was puzzling myself to find it out, when one of them soon cleared up the matter; he told me she was wife to a king that had been a christian, and that she had made him an heretic, and was in consequence condemned to burn for ever in mount Ætna. In short, I found it was no other than poor Anne Boloyne. As soon as I mentioned the name, *Si signor*, said the fellow, *l'istessa, l'istessa, la conosce meglio che noi.* I asked, if her husband was there too, for that he deserved it much better than she: *sicuro*, said he, and all his heretic subjects too; and if you are of that number, you need not be in such a hurry to get thither, you will be sure of it at last. I thanked him, and went to join our company, not a little amused with the conversation.

We soon after left Nicolosi, and in an hour and a half's travelling, over barren ashes and lava, we arrived on the confines of the Regione Sylvosa, or the Temperate Zone. As soon as we entered these delightful forests, we seemed to have got into another world. The air, which before was sultry and hot, was now cool and refreshing: and every breeze was loaded with a thousand perfumes, the whole ground being covered over with the richest aromatic plants. Many parts of this region are surely the most heavenly spots upon earth; and if Ætna resembles hell within, it may with equal justice be said to resemble paradise without.

It is indeed a curious consideration, that this mountain should re-unite every beauty and every horror; and, in short, all the most oppo-

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ſite and diſſimilar objects in nature. Here you obſerve a gulph, that formerly threw out torrents of fire, now covered with the moſt luxurian vegetation; and from an object of terror, become one of delight. Here you gather the moſt delicious fruit, riſing from what was but lately a black and barren rock. Here the ground is covered with every flower; and we wander over theſe beauties, and contemplate this wilderneſs of ſweets, without conſidering that hell, with all its terrors, is immediately under our feet; and that but a few yards ſeparate us from lakes of liquid fire and brimſtone.

But our aſtoniſhment ſtill encreaſes, on caſting our eyes on the higher regions of the mountain. There we behold in perpetual union, the two elements that are at perpetual war; an immenſe gulph of fire, for ever exiſting in the midſt of ſnows which it has not power to melt: and immenſe fields of ſnow and ice for ever ſurrounding this gulph of fire, which they have not power to extinguiſh.

The woody region of Ætna aſcends for about eight or nine miles, and forms a zone or girdle, of the brighteſt green, all around the mountain. This night we paſſed through little more than the half of it; arriving ſome time before ſun-ſet at our lodgings, which was no other than a large cave, formed by one of the moſt ancient and venerable lavas. It is called *La Spelonca Del Capriole*, or the goats cavern, becauſe frequented by thoſe animals; who take refuge there in bad weather.

Here we were delighted with the contemplation

tion of many grave and beautiful objects; the proſpect on all ſides is immenſe; and we already ſeem to be lifted from the earth, and to have got into a new world.

Our cavern is ſurrounded by the moſt ſtately and majeſtic oaks; of the dry leaves of which, we made very comfortable beds; and with our hatchets, which we had brought on purpoſe we had cut down great branches, and, in a ſhort time, had a fire large enough to roaſt an ox. I obſerved my thermometer, and found, from 71 at Nicoloſi, it had now fallen below 60. The barometer ſtood at 24: 2. In one end of our cave we ſtill found a great quantity of ſnow, which ſeemed to be ſent there on purpoſe for us, as there was no water to be found. With this we filled our tea-kettle, as tea and bread and butter was the only ſupper we had provided; and probably the beſt one to prevent us from being overcome by ſleep or fatigue.

Not a great way from this cavern, are two of the moſt beautiful mountains of all that number that ſpring from Ætna. I mounted one of our beſt mules, and with a good deal of difficulty arrived at the ſummit of the higheſt of them, juſt a little before ſun-ſet. The proſpect of Sicily, with the ſurrounding ſea and all its iſlands, was wonderfully noble. The whole courſe of the river Semetus, the ruins of Hybla, and ſeveral other ancient towns; the rich corn fields and vineyards on the lower region of the mountain, and the amazing number of beautiful mountains below, made a delightful ſcene. The hollow craters of theſe two mountains are

each of them confiderably larger than that of Vefuvius. They are now filled with ftately oaks, and covered to a great depth with the richeft foil. I obferved that this region of Ætna, like the former, is compofed of lava; but this is now covered fo deep with earth, that it is no where to be feen, but in the beds of the torrents. In many of thefe it is worn down by the water to the depth of fifty or fixty feet, and in one of them ftill confiderably more.—What an idea does this give of the amazing antiquity of the eruptions of this mountain?

As foon as it was dark, we retired to our cave and took poffeffion of our bed of leaves. Our reft, however, was fomewhat difturbed by the noife of a mountain that lay a good way off on our right. It difcharged quantities of fmoke and made feveral explofions like heavy cannon at a diftance; but what is fingular, we could obferve no appearance of fire.—This mountain was formed by an eruption in 1766, now upwards of four years ago; the fire of which is not yet extinguifhed, neither is the lava by any means cold. This lava fpent its fury on a beautiful foreft, which is laid wafte to the extent of a good many miles. In many places it has run into gullies of a great depth, which it has filled up to the height we are told, of 200 feet. It is in thefe places that it retains the greateft heat. On our road to-day we fcrambled up this lava, and went a confiderable way over its furface, which appeared perfectly cold; but it is certain, that in many places it ftill emits volumes of fmoke, particularly after rain; and the

the people ſay, what I can readily believe, that this will continue to be the caſe for ſome years, where the lava is thickeſt. A ſolid body of fire ſome hundreds of feet thick, and of ſo great an extent, muſt certainly retain its heat for many years. The ſurface indeed, ſoon becomes black and hard, and incloſes the liquid fire within, in a kind of ſolid box, excluding all impreſſions from the external air or from the weather. Thus I have ſeen, many months after eruptions of Mount Veſuvius, a bed of lava, though only of a few feet thick, has continued red-hot in the centre long after the ſurface was cold; and a ſtick thruſt into its crevices, inſtantly took fire, although there was no perceptible heat without.

Maſſa, a Sicilian author of credit, ſays he was at Catania eight years after the great eruption in 1669, and that he ſtill found the lava in many places was not cold. But there is an eaſy method of calculating the time that bodies take to cool:—Sir Iſaac Newton, I think, in his account of the comet of 1680, ſuppoſes the times to be as the ſquares of their diameters; and finding that a ſolid ball of metal of two inches, made red-hot, required upwards of an hour to become perfectly cold, made the calculation from that to a body of the diameter of the earth, and found it would require upwards of twenty thouſand years. If this rule be juſt, you may eaſily compute the time that the lava will take to become thoroughly cold; and that you may have time to do ſo, I ſhall here break off my letter, which I am obliged to write in bed, in a very awkward and diſagreeable poſ-

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ture; the caufe of which fhall be explained to you in my next. Adieu.

Ever yours.

LETTER X.

Catania, May 29th, at night.

AFTER getting a comfortable nap on our bed of leaves in the Speloncа del Capriole, we awoke about eleven o'clock; and melting down a fufficient quantity of fnow, we boiled our tea-kettle, and made a hearty meal, to prepare us for the remaining part of our expedition. We were nine in number; for we had our three fervants, the Cyclops (our conductor) and two men to take care of our mules. The Cyclops now began to difplay his great knowledge of the mountain, and we followed him with implicit confidence. He conducted us over "Antres vaft, and Defarts wild," where fcarce human foot had ever trod. Sometimes through gloomy forefts, which by day-light were delightful; but now, from the univerfal darknefs, the ruftling of the trees; the heavy, dull, bellowing of the mountain, the vaft expanfe of ocean ftretched at an immenfe diftance below us; infpired a kind of awful horror. Sometimes we found ourfelves afcending great rocks of lava, where, if our mules fhould make but a falfe ftep, we might be thrown head-long over the precipice. However, by the affiftance of the Cyclops, we overcame all thefe difficulties; and he

he managed matters ſo well, that in the ſpace of two hours we found we had got above the regions of vegetation; and had left the foreſts of Ætna far behind. Theſe appeared now like a dark and gloomy gulph below us, that ſurrounded the mountain.

The proſpect before us was of a very different nature; we beheld an expanſe of ſnow and ice that alarmed us exceedingly, and almoſt ſtaggered our reſolution. In the centre of this, but ſtill at a great diſtance, we deſcried the high ſummit of the mountain, rearing its tremendous head, and vomiting out torrents of ſmoke. It indeed appeared altogether innacceſſible, from the vaſt extent of the fields of ſnow and ice that ſurrounded it. Our diffidence was ſtill increaſed by the ſentiments of the Cyclops. He told us, it often happened, that the ſurface of the mountain being hot below melted the ſnow in particular ſpots, and formed pools of water, where it was impoſſible to foreſee our danger; that it likewiſe happened, that the ſurface of the water, as well as the ſnow, was ſometimes covered with black aſhes, that rendered it exceedingly deceitful; that however, if we thought proper, he ſhould lead us on with as much caution as poſſible. Accordingly, after holding a council of war, which you know people generally do when they are much afraid, we detached our cavalry to the foreſt below, and prepared to climb the ſnows. The Cyclops, after taking a great draught of brandy, deſired us to be of good cheer; that we had plenty of time, and might take as ma-

ny reſts as we pleaſed. That the ſnow could be little more than 7 miles, and that we ſhould certainly be able to paſs it before ſun-riſe. Accordingly, taking each of us a dram of liqueur, which ſoon removed every objection, we began our march.

The aſcent for ſome time was not ſteep; and as the ſurface of the ſnow ſunk a little, we had tolerable good footing; but as it ſoon began to grow ſteeper, we found our labour greatly increaſed: however, we determined to perſevere, calling to mind in the midſt of our labour, that the emperor Adrian, and the philoſopher Plato had undergone the ſame; and from the ſame motive too, to ſee the riſing ſun from the top of Ætna. After incredible labour and fatigue, but at the ſame time mixed with a great deal of pleaſure, we arrived before dawn at the ruins of an ancient ſtructure, called *Il Torre del Filoſofo*, ſuppoſed to have been built by the philoſopher Empedocles, who took up his habitation here, the better to ſtudy the nature of mount Ætna. By others it is ſuppoſed to be the ruins of a temple of Vulcan, whoſe ſhop, all the world knows (where he uſed to make excellent thunder-bolts and celeſtial armour, as well as nets to catch his wife when ſhe went aſtray) was ever kept in Mount Ætna. Here we reſted ourſelves for ſome time, and made a freſh application to our liqueur bottle, which I am perſuaded, both Vulcan and Empedocles, had they been here, would have greatly approved of after ſuch a march.

I found the mercury had fallen to 26: 6.

We had now time to pay our adorations in a ſilent contemplation of the ſublime objects of nature. The ſky was clear, and the immenſe vault of the heavens appeared in awful majeſty and ſplendour. We found ourſelves more ſtruck with veneration than below, and at firſt were at a loſs to know the cauſe; till we obſerved with aſtoniſhment the number of ſtars ſeemed to be infinitely encreaſed; and the light of each of them appeared brighter than uſual. The whiteneſs of the milky way was like a pure flame that ſhot acroſs the heavens; and with the naked eye we could obſerve cluſters of ſtars that were inviſible in the regions below. We did not at firſt attend to the cauſe, nor recollect that we had now paſſed through ten or twelve thouſand feet of groſs vapour, that blunts and confuſes every ray, before it reaches the ſurface of the earth. We were amazed at the diſtinctneſs of viſion, and exclaimed together, what a glorious ſituation for an obſervatory! had Empedocles had the eyes of Gallileo, what diſcoveries muſt he not have made! We regretted that Jupiter was not viſible, as I am perſuaded we might have diſcovered ſome of his ſatellites with the naked eye, or at leaſt with a ſmall glaſs which I had in my pocket. We obſerved a light a great way below us on the mountain, which ſeemed to move among the foreſts, but whether an Ignis Fatuus, or what it was, I ſhall not pretend to ſay. We likewiſe took notice of ſeveral of thoſe meteors called Falling Stars, which ſtill appeared to be as much elevated above us, as when ſeen from the plain; ſo

ſo that in all probability, thoſe bodies move in regions much beyond the bounds that ſome philoſophers have aſſigned to our atmoſphere.

After contemplating theſe objects for ſome time, we ſet off, and ſoon arrived at the foot of the great crater of the mountain. This is of an exact conical figure, and riſes equally on all ſides. It is compoſed ſolely of aſhes and other burnt materials, diſcharged from the mouth of the volcano, which is in its centre. This conical mountain is of a very great ſize; its circumference cannot be leſs than ten miles. Here we took a ſecond reſt, as the greateſt part of our fatigue ſtill remained. The mercury had fallen to 20 : 4½.—We found this mountain exceſſively ſteep; and although it had appeared black, yet it was likewiſe covered with ſnow, but the ſurface (luckily for us) was ſpread over with a pretty thick layer of aſhes, thrown out from the crater. Had it not been for this, we never ſhould have been able to get to the top; as the ſnow was every where frozen hard and ſolid, from the piercing cold of the air.

In about an hour's climbing, we arrived at a place where there was no ſnow; and where a warm and comfortable vapour iſſued from the mountain, which induced us to make another halt. Here I found the mercury at 19 : 6½. The thermometer was fallen three degrees below the point of congelation; and before we left the ſummit of Ætna, it fell two degrees more, viz. to 27.—From this ſpot it was only about 300 yards to the higheſt ſummit of the mountain, where we arrived in full time

time, to ſee the moſt wonderful and moſt ſublime ſight in nature.

But here deſcription muſt ever fall ſhort; for no imagination has dared to form an idea of ſo glorious and ſo magnificent a ſcene. Neither is there on the ſurface of this globe, any one point that unites ſo many awful and ſublime objects.—The immenſe elevation from the ſurface of the earth, drawn as it were to a ſingle point, without any neighbouring mountain for the ſenſes and imagination to reſt upon, and recover from their aſtoniſhment in their way down to the world. This point or pinnacle, raiſed on the brink of a bottomleſs gulph, as old as the world, often diſcharging rivers of fire, and throwing out burning rocks, with a noiſe that ſhakes the whole iſland. Add to this, the unbounded extent of the proſpect, comprehending the greateſt diverſity and the moſt beautiful ſcenery in nature; with the riſing ſun, advancing in the eaſt, to illuminate the wondrous ſcene.

The whole atmoſphere by degrees kindled up, and ſhewed dimly and faintly the boundleſs proſpect around. Both ſea and land looked dark and confuſed, as if only emerging from their original chaos; and light and darkneſs ſeemed ſtill undivided; till the morning by degrees advancing, completed the ſeparation. The ſtars are extinguiſhed, and the ſhades diſappear. The foreſts, which but now ſeemed black and bottomleſs gulphs, from whence no ray was reflected to ſhew their form or colours, appear a new creation riſing to the ſight; catching life and beauty

beauty from every increaſing beam. The ſcene ſtill enlarges, and the horizon ſeems to widen and expand itſelf on all ſides; till the ſun, like the great Creator, appears in the eaſt, and with his pleſtic ray completes the mighty ſcene.—All appears enchantment; and it is with difficulty we can believe we are ſtill on earth. The ſenſes, unaccuſtomed to the ſublimity of ſuch a ſcene, are bewildered and confounded; and it is not till after ſome time, that they are capable of ſeparating and judging of the objects that compoſe it.—The body of the ſun is ſeen riſing from the ocean, immenſe tracks both of ſea and land intervening; the iſlands of Lipari, Panari, Alicudi, Strombolo, and Volcano, with their ſmoking ſummits, appear under your feet; and you look down on the whole of Sicily as on a map; and can trace every river through all its windings, from its ſource to its mouth. The view is abſolutely boundleſs on every ſide; nor is there any one object, within the circle of viſion, to interrupt it; ſo that the ſight is every where loſt in the immenſity: and I am perſuaded it is only from the imperfection of our organs, that the coaſts of Africa, and even of Greece, are not diſcovered, as they are certainly above the horizon. The circumference of the viſible horizon on the top of Ætna cannot be leſs than 2000 miles: At Malta, which is near 200 miles diſtant, they perceive all the eruptions from the ſecond region; and that iſland is often diſcovered from about one half the elevation of the mountain; ſo that at the whole elevation, the horizon muſt extend to near double that diſtance,

or

or 400 miles, which makes 800 miles for the diameter of the circle, and 2400 for the circumference. But this is by much too vaſt for our ſenſes, not intended to graſp ſo boundleſs a ſcene. I find, indeed, by ſome of the Sicilian authors particularly Maſſa, that the African coaſt, as well as that of Naples, with many of its iſlands, have been diſcovered from the top of Ætna. Of this, however, we cannot boaſt, though we can very well believe it. Indeed, if we knew the height of the mountain, it would be eaſy to calculate the extent of its viſible horizon; and *(vice verſa)* if its viſible horizon was exactly aſcertained, it would be an eaſy matter to calculate the height of the mountain.—But the moſt beautiful part of the ſcene is certainly the mountain itſelf; the iſland of Sicily, and the numerous iſlands lying round it. All theſe, by a kind of magic in viſion, that I am at a loſs to account for, ſeem as if they were brought cloſe round the ſkirts of Ætna; the diſtances appearing reduced to nothing.—Perhaps this ſingular effect is produced by the rays of light paſſing from a rarer medium into a denſer; which (from a well known law in optics) to an obſerver in the rare medium, appears to lift up objects that are at the bottom of the denſe one; as a piece of money placed in a baſon appears lifted up as ſoon as the baſon is filled with water.

The *Regione Deſerta*, or the frigid zone of Ætna, is the firſt object that calls your attention. It is marked out by a circle of ſnow and ice, which extends on all ſides to the diſtance of about eight miles. In the centre of this circle

cle, the great crater of the mountain rears its burning head; and the regions of intenſe cold and of intenſe heat ſeem for ever to be united in the ſame point.—On the north ſide of the ſnowy region, they aſſure us, there are ſeveral ſmall lakes that are never thawed; and that in many places, the ſnow, mixed with the aſhes and ſalts of the mountain, is accumulated to a vaſt depth: And indeed I ſuppoſe the quantity of the ſalts contained in this mountain, is one great reaſon of the preſervation of its ſnows.—The *Regione Deſerta* is immediately ſucceeded by the *Sylvoſa*, or the woody region; which forms a circle or girdle of the moſt beautiful green, which ſurrounds the mountain on all ſides, and is certainly one of the moſt delightful ſpots on earth. This preſents a remarkable contraſt with the deſart region. It is not ſmooth and even, like the greateſt part of the latter; but is finely variegated by an infinite number of thoſe beautiful little mountains that have been formed by the different eruptions of Ætna. All theſe have now acquired a wonderful degree of fertility, except a very few that are but newly formed; that is, within theſe five or ſix hundred years: For it certainly requires ſome thouſands to bring them to their greateſt degree of perfection. We looked down into the craters of theſe, and attempted, but in vain, to number them.

The circumference of this zone or great circle on Ætna is not leſs than 70 or 80 miles. It is every where ſucceeded by the vineyards, orchards, and corn-fields that compoſe the *Regi-*

one Culta, or the fertile region. This laſt zone is much broader than the others and extends on all ſides to the foot of the mountain. Its whole circumference, according to Recupero, is 183 miles. It is likewiſe covered with a number of little conical and ſpherical mountains, and exhibits a wonderful variety of forms and colours, and makes a delightful contraſt with the other two regions. It is bounded by the ſea to the ſouth and ſouth-eaſt, and on all its other ſides by the rivers Semetus and Alcantara, which run almoſt round it. The whole courſe of theſe rivers is ſeen at once, and all their beautiful windings through theſe fertile vallies, looked upon as the favourite poſſeſſion of Ceres herſelf, and the very ſcene of the rape of her daughter Proſerpine.

Caſt your eyes a little farther, and you embrace the whole iſland, and ſee all its cities, rivers, and mountains, delineated in the great chart of Nature: All the adjacent iſlands, the whole coaſt of Italy, as far as your eye can reach; for it is no where bounded, but every where loſt in the ſpace. On the ſun's firſt riſing, the ſhadow of the mountain extends acroſs the whole iſland, and makes a large tract viſible even in the ſea and in the air. By degrees this is ſhortened, and, in a little time, is confined only to the neighbourhood of Ætna.

We had now time to examine a fourth region of that wonderful mountain, very different, indeed, from the others, and productive of very different ſenſations; but which has, undoubtedly, given being to all the reſt; I mean the region of fire.

 The

The preſent crater of this immenſe volcano is a circle of about three miles and a half in circumference. It goes ſhelving down on each ſide, and forms a regular hollow like a vaſt amphitheatre. From many places of this ſpace, iſſue volumes of ſulphureous ſmoke, which, being much heavier than the circumambient air, inſtead of riſing in it, as ſmoke generally does, immediately on its getting out of the crater, rolls down the ſide of the mountain like a torrent, till coming to that part of the atmoſphere of the ſame ſpecific gravity with itſelf, it ſhoots off horizontally, and forms a large track in the air, according to the direction of the wind; which, happily for us, carried it exactly to the ſide oppoſite to that where we were placed. The crater is ſo hot, that it is very dangerous, if not impoſſible, to go down into it; beſides, the ſmoke is very incommodious, and in many places, the ſurface is ſo ſoft, there have been inſtances of people ſinking down in it, and paying for their temerity with their lives. Near the centre of the crater is the great mouth of the volcano. That tremenduous gulph ſo celebrated in all ages, looked upon as the terror and ſcourge both of this and another life; and equally uſeful to ancient poets or to modern divines, when the Muſe, or when the ſpirit inſpires. We beheld it with awe and with horror, and were not ſurpriſed that it had been conſidered as the place of the damned. When we reflect on the immenſity of its depth, the vaſt cells and caverns whence ſo many lavas have iſſued; the force of its internal fire, to raiſe

raise up those lavas to so vast a height, to support as it were in the air, and even to force it over the very summit of the crater, with all the dreadful accompaniments; the boiling of the matter, the shaking of the mountain, the explosions of flaming rocks, &c. we must allow, that the most enthusiast imagination, in the midst of all its terrors, hardly ever formed an idea of a hell more dreadful.

It was with a mixture both of pleasure and pain, that we quitted this awful scene. But the wind had risen very high, and clouds began to gather round the mountain. In a short time they formed like another heaven below us, and we were in hopes of seeing a thunder-storm under our feet: A scene that is not uncommon in these exalted regions, and which I have already seen on the top of the high Alps; but the clouds were soon dispelled again by the force of the wind, and we were disappointed in our expectations.

I had often been told of the great effect produced by discharging a gun on the top of high mountains. I tried it here, when we were a good deal surprised to find, that instead of increasing the sound, it was almost reduced to nothing. The report was not equal to that of a pocket pistol; We compared it to the stroke of a stick on a door; and surely it is consistent with reason, that the thinner the air is, the less its impression must be on the ear; for in a vacuum there can be no noise, or no impression can be made; and the nearer the approach to a vacuum, the impression must al-

ways be the ſmaller. Where thoſe great effects have been produced, it muſt have been amongſt a number of mountains, where the ſound is reverberated from one to the other.

When we arrived at the foot of the cone, we obſerved ſome rocks of an incredible ſize, that have been diſcharged from the crater. The largeſt that has been obſerved from Veſuvius, is a round one of about twelve feet diameter. Theſe are much greater; indeed almoſt in proportion of the mountains to each other.

On our arrival at the Torre del Filoſofo, we could not help admiring, that the ruins of this ſtructure have remained uncovered for ſo many ages, ſo near the top of Ætna, when thouſands of places at a great diſtance from it, have been repeatedly buried by its lavas, in a much ſhorter time. A proof that few eruptions have riſen ſo high in the mountain.

Empedocles was a native of Agrigentum, and is ſuppoſed to have died 400 years before the Chriſtian æra. Perhaps his vanity more than his philoſophy led him to this elevated ſituation; nay, it is ſaid to have carried him ſtill much farther:—That he might be looked upon as a god, and that the people might ſuppoſe he was taken up to heaven, he is recorded to have thrown himſelf headlong into the great gulph of mount Ætna, never ſuppoſing that his death could be diſcovered to mankind; but the treacherous mountain threw out his ſlippers, which were of braſs, and announced to the world the fate of the philoſopher, who, by his death, as well as life, wanted only to impoſe upon mankind,

kind, and make them believe that he was greater than they.

However, if there is ſuch a thing as philoſophy on earth, this ſurely ought to be its ſeat. The proſpect is little inferior to that from the ſummit; and the mind enjoys a degree of ſerenity here, that even few philoſophers I believe, could ever boaſt of on that tremendous point. —All Nature lies expanded below your feet, in her gayeſt and moſt luxuriant dreſs, and you ſtill behold united under one point of view, all the ſeaſons of the year, and all the climates of the earth. The meditations are ever elevated in proportion to the grandeur and ſublimity of the objects that ſurround us; and here, where you have all nature to arouſe your admiration, what mind can remain inactive?

It has likewiſe been obſerved, and from experience I can ſay with truth; that on the tops of the higheſt mountains, where the air is ſo pure and refined; and where there is not that immenſe weight of groſs vapours preſſing upon the body; the mind acts with greater freedom, and all the functions both of ſoul and body are performed in a ſuperior manner. It would appear, that in proportion as we are raiſed above the habitations of men, all low and vulgar ſentiments are left behind; and that the ſoul, in approaching the æthereal regions, ſhake off its earthly affections, and already acquires ſomething of their celeſtial purity.—Here, where you ſtand under a ſerene ſky, and behold, with equal ſerenity, the tempeſt and ſtorm forming below your feet; the lightning, darting from

cloud to cloud, and the thunder rolling round the mountain, and threatning with deſtruction the poor wretches below; the mind conſiders the little ſtorms of the human paſſions as equally below her notice. Surely the ſituation alone, is enough to inſpire philoſophy, and Empedocles had good reaſon for chuſing it.

But, alas! how vain are all our reaſonings! In the very midſt of theſe meditations, my philoſophy was at once overſet, and in a moment I found myſelf relapſed into a poor miſerable mortal; was obliged to own, that pain was the greateſt of evils; and would have given the world to have been once more arrived at thoſe humble habitations, which, but a moment before, I had looked down upon with ſuch contempt.—In running over the ice, my leg folded under me, and I received ſo violent a ſprain, that in a few minutes it ſwelled to a great degree, and I found myſelf unable to put my foot to the ground. Every muſcle and fibre was at that time chilled and froze by the extreme cold, the thermometer continuing ſtill below the point of congelation. It was this circumſtance, I ſuppoſe, that made the pain ſo violent; for I lay a conſiderable time on the ice in great agony: However, in theſe exalted regions, it was impoſſible to have a horſe, or a carriage of any kind; and your poor philoſopher was obliged to hop on one leg, with two men ſupporting him, for ſeveral miles over the ſnow; and our wags here alledge, that he left the greateſt part of his philoſophy behind him, for the uſe of Empedocles's heirs and ſucceſſors.

I was

I was happy to get to my mule, but when I once more found myſelf on our beds of leaves in the Speloнca del Capriole, I thought I was in Paradiſe: So true it is, that a removal of pain is the greateſt of pleaſures. The agony I ſuffered, had thrown me into a profuſe ſweat and a fever; however, in an inſtant I fell faſt aſleep, and in an hour and a half, awaked in perfect health. We had an excellent diſh of tea, the moſt refreſhing and agreeable I ever drank in all my life.

We left the ſummit of the mountain about ſix o'clock, and it was eight at night before we reached Catania.—We obſerved, both with pleaſure and pain, the change of the climate as we deſcended.—From the regions of the moſt rigid winter, we ſoon arrived at thoſe of the moſt delightful ſpring. On firſt entering the foreſts, the trees were ſtill bare as in December, not a ſingle leaf to be ſeen; but after we had deſcended a few miles, we found ourſelves in the mildeſt, and the ſofteſt of climates: the trees in full verdure, and the fields covered with all the flowers of the ſummer; but as ſoon as we got out of the woods, and entered the torrid zone, we found the heats altogether inſupportable, and ſuffered dreadfully from them before we reached the city. On the road I ſaw many mountains which I intended to have viſited, but my ſprain put it out of my power. One of the moſt remarkable is called the *Monte Pelluſe*, the lava of which deſtroyed the great aqueduct of Catania for eighteen miles. It has here and there left a few arches; but nothing of any conſequence.

not

Not far from this mountain ſtands the *Monte Victoria*, one of the moſt beautiful of all the numerous family of Ætna. It is of a pretty large ſize, and perfectly regular, and ſeems to be in the gayeſt dreſs of any. Many of its trees, which, at a diſtance, we took to be oranges and citrons, appeared to be in full blow. It was the lava of this mountain that is ſaid to have covered up the port of Ulyſſes, which is now three miles diſtant from the ſea; but I ſhould ſuppoſe this eruption to have been much older than either Ulyſſes or Troy.

On our arrival at Catania, we went immediately to bed, being exceedingly oppreſſed by the fatigue of our expedition; but ſtill more by the violent heat of the day. A day, in which I think, I have enjoyed a greater degree of pleaſure, and ſuffered a greater degree of pain, than in any other day of my life.

As my leg continues very much ſwelled, I am ſtill confined to my room, and moſtly, indeed, to my bed, from whence I have written you the greateſt part of theſe two epiſtles, the enormous length of which I am aſhamed of. However, as I have ſtill omitted ſeveral articles, that I intended to take notice of, I ſhall add a ſequel to-morrow; and ſo conclude my account of mount Ætna. Had it not been for this abominable ſprain, that holds me faſt by the foot, you probably had not got off ſo eaſily; but I am obliged to drop all farther thoughts of climbing mountains, though there are many things I ſtill wanted to examine. Adieu.

Ever yours.

LETTER

LETTER XI.

Catania, May, 30th.

WE took care to regulate two barometers at the foot of the mountain. One of which was left with the Canonico Recupero, and the other we carried along with us. The former our friend aſſures us, had no ſenſible variation during our abſence. We both left it and found it at 29 inches 8 lines and a half, Engliſh meaſure. On our arrival at Catania, the one we carried up with us had riſen exactly to the ſame point.

I have likewiſe a good quick-ſilver thermometer, which I borrowed from the Neapolitan philoſopher, the Padre della Torre, who furniſhed us with letters from this place, and would have accompanied us, could he have obtained leave of the king. It is made by Adams's at London, and (as I myſelf proved) exactly graduated from the two points of freezing and boiling water. It is upon Farenheit's ſcale. I ſhall mark the heights in the different regions of Ætna, with the rules for eſtimating the elevation of mountains by the barometer, which, I am ſorry to ſay, have been hitherto ſo very ill aſcertained. Caſſini, Bouger, and the others who have written on the ſubject, to the reproach of ſcience, differing ſo much amongſt themſelves, that it is with difficulty we can come near the truth.

Ætna has often been meaſured, but I believe never with any degree of accuracy; and it is really a ſhame to the ſociety eſtabliſhed in this place, called the Ætnean academy, whoſe original inſtitution was to ſtudy the nature and operations,

perations of this wonderful mountain. It was my full intention to have meaſured it geometrically; but I am ſorry to ſay, although this is both the ſeat of an academy and univerſity, yet there was no quadrant to be had. Of all the mountains I have ever ſeen, Ætna would be the eaſieſt to meaſure, and with the greateſt certainty, and perhaps the propereſt place on the globe to eſtabliſh an exact rule of menſuration by the barometer. There is a beach of a vaſt extent, that begins exactly at the foot of the mountain, and runs for a great many miles along the coaſt. The ſea-mark of this beach forms the meridian to the ſummit of the mountain. Here you are ſure of a perfect level, and make the baſe of your triangle of what length you pleaſe. But unfortunately this menſuration has never been executed, at leaſt with the tolerable degree of preciſion.

Kircher pretends to have meaſured it, and to have found it 4000 French toiſes in height; which is more than any of the Andes, or indeed than any mountain upon earth. The Italian mathematicians are ſtill more abſurd. Some of them make it eight miles, ſome ſix, and ſome four. Amici, the laſt, and I believe the beſt who has made the attempt, reduces it to three miles 264 paces; but even this muſt be exceedingly erroneous; and probably the perpendicular height of Ætna does not exceed 12,000 feet, or little more than two miles. I ſhall mark the different methods of determining heights by the barometer; and you may chuſe which you pleaſe. I believe the allowance in

in all of them, particularly in great elevations, where the air is so exceedingly thin and light, is much too small. Mikeli, whose mensurations are esteemed more exact, has ever found it so. Cassini allows, I think, ten French toises of elevation, for every line of mercury, adding one foot to each ten, two to the second, three to the third, and so on: But surely the weight of the air diminishes in a much greater proportion.

Boguer takes the difference of the logarithms of the height of the barometer in lines (supposing these logarithms to consist only of five figures); from this difference he takes away a 30th part, and what remains he supposes to be the difference of elevation. I do not recollect his reason for the supposition; but the rule seems to be still more erroneous than the other, and has been entirely laid aside. I am told, that accurate experiments have been made at Geneva, to establish the mensuration with the barometer; but I have not yet been able to procure them. Mr de la Hire allows twelve toises four feet for the line of mercury: And Picart, one of the most exact French academicians, fourteen toises, or about ninety English feet.

Height of Farenheit's Thermometer.

At Catania May 26, at mid-day - - 76
Ditto, May 27, at five in the morning - 72
At Nicolosi, 12 miles up the mountain, mid-day - - - - - - - - - 73
At the cave, called Spelonca del Capriole, in the second region, where there was still a considerable quantity of snow, at seven at night - - - - 61

In

In the ſame cave at half an hour paſt eleven	52
At the Torre del Filoſofo, in the third region at three in the morning	34½
At the foot of the crater of Ætna	33
About half way up the crater	29
On the ſummit of Ætna, a little before ſunriſe	27

Height of the Barometer in inches and lines.

At the ſea-ſide at Catania	29 8½
At the village of Piedmonte, in the firſt region of Ætna	27 8
At Nicoloſi, in the ſame region	27 1½
At the Caſtagno de Cento Cavalli, in the ſecond region	26 5½
At the Spelonca del Capriole, in the ſecond region	24 2
At the Torre del Filoſofo, in the third region	20 5
At the foot of the crater	20 4½
Within about 300 yards of the ſummit	19 6½
At the ſummit of Ætna (ſuppoſed to be about)	19 4

The wind at the ſummit was ſo violent that I could not make the obſervation with perfect exactneſs; however, I am pretty certain that I was within half a line.

I own I did not believe we ſhould find Ætna ſo high. I had heard indeed that it was higher than any of the Alps, but I never gave credit to it:—How great then was my aſtoniſhment to find

find that the mercury fell almoſt two inches lower than I had ever obſerved it on the very higheſt of the acceſſible Alps; at the ſame time I am perſuaded there are many inacceſſible points of the Alps; (particularly Mont Blanc) that are ſtill much higher than Ætna.

I found the magnetical needle greatly agitated near the ſummit of the mountain; (the Padre della Torre told me, he had made the ſame obſervation on Veſuvius) however, it always fixed at the north point, though it took longer time in fixing than below. But what Recupero told me happened to him, was very ſingular.—Soon after the eruption 1755, he placed his compaſs on the lava. The needle he ſays, to his great aſtoniſhment, was agitated with much violence for ſome conſiderable time, till at laſt it entirely loſt its magnetical power, ſtanding indiſcriminately at every point of the compaſs; and this it never after recovered, till it was again touched with the loadſtone.

The wind, and my unfortunate ſprain together, in a great meaſure prevented our electrical experiments, on which we had built not a little: however, I found that round Nicoloſi, and particularly on the top of Monpelieri, the air was in a very favourable ſtate for electrical operations. Here the little pith-balls, when inſolated, were ſenſibly affected, and repelled each other above an inch. I expected this electrical ſtate of the air would have increaſed as we advanced on the mountain; but at the cave where we ſlept, I could obſerve no ſuch effect. Perhaps, it was owing to the exhalations from the

trees and vegetables, which are there exceedingly luxuriant; whereas about Nicolosi, and round Monpelieri, there is hardly any thing but lava and dry hot sand.—Or perhaps it might be owing to the evening being farther advanced, and the dews beginning to fall. However, I have no doubt, that upon these mountains formed by eruption, where the air is strongly impregnated with sulphureous effluvia, great electrical discoveries might be made. And perhaps, of all the reasons assigned for the wonderful vegetation that is performed on this mountain, there is none that contributes so much towards it, as this constant electrical state of the air: For from a variety of experiments it has been found, that an increase of the electrical matter adds much to the progress of vegetation. It probably acts there in the same manner as on the animal body;—the circulation we know is performed quicker; and the juices are driven through the small vessels with more ease and celerity. This has often been proved from the immediate removal of obstructions by electricity;—and probably the rubbing with dry and warm flannel, esteemed so efficacious in such cases, is doing nothing more than exciting a great degree of electricity in the part; but it has likewise been demonstrated, by the common experiment of making water drop through a small capillary syphon, which the moment it is electrified runs in a full stream.—I have indeed, very little doubt, that the fertility of our seasons depends as much on this quality in the air, as either on its heats or moisture.

Electricity

Electricity will probably soon be considered as the great vivifying principle of Nature, by which she carries on most of her operations.—It is a fifth element, distinct from, and of a superior nature to the other four, which only compose the corporeal parts of matter: But this subtile active fluid is a kind of soul that pervades and quickens every particle of it.—When an equal quantity of this is diffused through the air, and over the face of the earth, every thing continues calm and quiet; but if by any accident one part of matter has acquired a greater quantity than another, the most dreadful consequences often ensue before the equilibrium can be restored.—Nature seems to fall into convulsions, and many of her works are destroyed.—All the great phenomena are produced; thunder, lightning, earthquakes, and whirlwinds; For, I believe, there is little doubt, that all these frequently depend on this sole cause. And again, if we look down from the sublime of nature to its minutiæ, we shall still find the same power acting, though perhaps in less legible characters; for as the knowledge of its operations are still in its infancy, they are generally misunderstood, or ascribed to some other cause. However, I have no doubt, that in process of time these will be properly investigated; when mankind will wonder how much they have been in the dark. It will then possibly be found, that what we call sensibility of nerves, and many of those diseases that the faculty have as yet only invented names for, are owing to the body's being possessed of too large or too small a quantity of this subtile and

active fluid; that very fluid, perhaps, that is the vehicle of all our feelings; and which they have so long searched for in vain in the nerves: For I have sometimes been led to think, that this sense was nothing else than a slighter kind of electric effect, to which the nerves serve as conductors; and that it is by the rapid circulation of this penetrating and animating fire that our sensations are performed. We all know, that in damp and hazy weather, when it seems to be blunted and absorbed by the humidity; when its activity is lost, and little or none of it can be collected; we ever find our spirits more languid, and our sensibility less acute: but in the Sirocc wind at Naples, when the air seems totally deprived of it, the whole system is unstrung, and the nerves seem to lose both their tension and elasticity, till the north or west wind awakens the activity of this animating power, which soon restores the tone, and enlivens all nature, which seemed to droop and languish during its absence.

It is likewise well known, that there have been instances of the human body becoming electric without the mediation of any electrical substance, and even emitting sparks of fire with a disagreable sensation, and an extreme degree of nervous sensibility.

About seven or eight years ago, a lady in Switzerland was affected in this manner, and though I was not able to learn all the particulars of her case, yet several Swiss gentlemen have confirmed to me the truth of the story.—She was uncommonly sensible of every change of weather.

weather, and had her electrical feelings strongest in a clear day, or during the passage of thunder clouds, when the air is known to be replete with that fluid. Her case, like most others which the doctors can make nothing of, was decided to be a *nervous* one; for the real meaning of that term I take it to be only, that the physician does not understand what it is.

Two gentlemen of Geneva had a short experience of the same sort of complaint, though still in a much superior degree.—Professor Saussure and young Mr Jalabert, when travelling over one of the high Alps, were caught amongst thunder-clouds; and to their utter astonishment, found their bodies so full of electrical fire, that spontaneous flashes darted from their fingers with a crackling noise, and the same kind of sensation as when strongly electrified by art.— This was communicated by Mr Jalabert to the Academy of Sciences at Paris, I think, in the year 1763; and you will find it recorded in their memoirs.

It seems pretty evident, I think, that these feelings were owing to the bodies being possessed of too great a share of electric fire. This is an uncommon case; but I do not think it at all improbable, that many of our invalids, particularly the hypochondriac, and those we call *Malades Imaginaires*, owe their disagreeable feelings to the opposite cause, or the bodies being possessed of too small a quantity of this fire; for we find that a diminution of it in the air seldom fails to increase their uneasy sensations, and *vica versa*.

 Perhaps

Perhaps it might be of ſervice to theſe people to wear ſome electric ſubſtance next their ſkin, to defend the nerves and fibres from the damp, or non-electric air.—I would propoſe a waiſtcoat of the fineſt flannel, which ſhould be kept perfectly clean and dry; for the effluvia of the body, in caſe of any violent perſpiration, will ſoon deſtroy its electric quality: This ſhould be covered by another of the ſame ſize of ſilk. The animal heat and the friction that exerciſe muſt occaſion betwixt theſe two ſubſtances, produce a powerful electricity; and would form a kind of electric atmoſphere around the body, that might poſſibly be one of the beſt preſervatives againſt the effect of damps.

As for our Swiſs lady, I have little doubt that her complaints were owing in great part, perhaps entirely, to her dreſs; and that a very ſmall alteration, almoſt in any part of it, would effectually have cured her. A lady who has her head ſurrounded with wires, and her hair ſtuck full of metal pins, and who at the ſame time ſtands upon dry ſilk, is to all intents and purpoſes an electrical conductor inſolated, and prepared for collecting the fire from the atmoſphere: And it is not at all ſurpriſing, that during thunder-ſtorms, or when the air is extremely replete with electrical matter, ſhe ſhould emit ſparks, and exhibit other appearances of electricity.—I imagine a very trifling change of dreſs, which from the conſtant verſatility of their modes may ſome day take place, would render this lady's diſeaſe altogether epidemical amongſt the ſex.—Only let the ſoles of their

ſhoes

be made of an electric ſubſtance, and let the wires of their caps, and pins of their hair, be ſomewhat lengthened and pointed outwards; and I think their is little doubt, that they will often find themſelves in an electrified ſtate:—But, indeed, if they only wear ſilk, or even worſted ſtockings, it may ſometimes prove ſufficient; for I have often inſolated electrometers as perfectly by placing them on a piece of dry ſilk or flannel, as on glaſs.

How little do our ladies imagine, when they ſurround their heads with wire, the moſt powerful of all conductors; and at the ſame time wear ſtockings, ſhoes, and gowns of ſilk, one of the moſt powerful repellents, that they prepare their bodies in the ſame manner, and according to the ſame principles, as electricians prepare their conductors, for attracting the fire of lightning! If they cannot be brought to relinquiſh their wire caps and their pins, might they not fall upon ſome ſuch preſervative as thoſe which of late years have been applied to objects of leſs conſequence?

Suppoſe that every lady ſhould provide herſelf with a ſmall chain, or wire, to be hooked on at pleaſure during thunder-ſtorms. This ſhould paſs from her cap over the thickeſt part of her hair, which will prevent the fire from being communicated to her head; and ſo down to the ground.—It is plain this will act in the ſame manner as the conductors on the top of ſteeples, which, from the metal ſpires that are commonly placed there, analogous to the pins and wires, were ſo liable to accidents. You may

may laugh at this; but I aſſure you I never was more ſerious in my life. A very amiable lady of my acquaintance, Mrs Douglas, of Kelſo, had almoſt loſt her life by one of thoſe caps mounted on wire. She was ſtanding at an open window during a thunder-ſtorm: The lightning was attracted by the wire, and the cap was burnt to aſhes; happily her hair was in its natural ſtate, without powder, pomatum, or pins; and prevented the fire from being conducted to her head; for as ſhe felt no kind of ſhock, it is probable that it went off from the wires of the cap to the wall, cloſe to which ſhe then ſtood. If it had found any conductor to carry it to her head or body, in all probability ſhe muſt have been killed.—A good ſtrong head of hair if it is kept perfectly clean and dry, is probably one of the beſt preſervatives againſt the fire of lightning. But ſo ſoon as it is ſtuffed full of powder and pomatum, and bound together with pins, its repellent force is loſt, and it becomes a conductor.*—But I beg pardon for theſe

* Since the writing of theſe letters, the author has made ſome experiments on the electricity of hair; which tend ſtill to convince him the more of what he has advanced. A lady told him, that on combing her hair in froſty weather, ſhe had ſometimes obſerved ſparks of fire to iſſue from it. This made him think of attempting to collect the electrical fire from hair alone, without the aſſiſtance of any other electrical apparatus. To this end, he deſired a young lady to ſtand on a cake of bees-wax, and to comb her ſiſter's hair, who was ſitting on a chair before her.—Soon after ſhe began to comb, the young lady on the wax was greatly aſtoniſhed to find her whole body electrified; darting out ſparks of fire againſt every object that approached her. The hair was extremely electrical,

theſe ſurmiſes: I throw them in your way only to improve upon it at leiſure: For we have it ever in our power to be making experiments in electricity. And although this fluid is the moſt ſubtile and active of any we know, we can command it on all occaſions; and I am now ſo accuſtomed to its operations, that I ſeldom comb my hair, or pull off a ſtocking, without obſerving them, under ſome form or other. How ſurpriſing is it then that mankind ſhould have lived and breathed for ſo many thouſand years, without almoſt ever ſuppoſing that it exiſted! But to return to our mountain.

Recupero told me he had obſerved the ſame phenomenon here that is common in the eruptions of mount Veſuvius, viz. red forked lightning darting from the ſmoke, without being followed by the noiſe of thunder. The reaſon poſſibly is, that the crater and ſmoke are at that time ſo highly electrical, that like a cylinder or globe, heated by friction, it throws off ſpontaneous flaſhes into the air, without being brought into the attraction of any conductor, or body leſs electric than itſelf; (indeed the ſpontaneous

lectrical, and affected an electrometer at a very great diſtance: He charged a metal conductor from it with great eaſe; and in the ſpace of a few minutes collected as much fire immediately from the hair, as to kindle common ſpirits; and by means of a ſmall phial, gave many ſmart ſhocks to all the company. A full account of theſe experiments was lately read before the Royal Society. They were made during the time of a very hard froſt, and on a ſtrong head of hair, where no powder or pomatum had been uſed for many months.

ſpontaneous diſcharges from a good electrical globe, often bear a perfect reſemblance to this kind of lightning) however, if a non-electric cloud were to paſs near the crater at that time, the craſh of thunder would probably be very violent, which indeed is often the caſe when the air is full of wet clouds in the time of an eruption; but when this does not happen, the equilibrium is probably reſtored by degrees, and without a ſhock, from the ſurplus of electrical matter being gradually communicated to the earth and ſea all around the mountain; the immenſe lavas that have run from it, ſerving as conductors.

So highly electric is the vapour of volcanos, that it has been obſerved in ſome eruptions both of Ætna and Veſuvius, that the whole track of ſmoke, which ſometimes extended above 100 miles, produced the moſt dreadful effects; killing ſhepherds and flocks on the mountains; blaſting trees, and ſetting fire to houſes; where-ever it met with them on an elevated ſituation. Now probably the flying of a kite, with a wire round its ſtring, would ſoon have diſarmed this formidable cloud. Theſe effects, however, only happen when the air is dry and little agitated, but when it is full of moiſt vapour, the great rarefaction from the heat of lava generally brings it down in violent torrents of rain, which ſoon convey the electrical matter from the clouds to the earth, and reſtores the equilibrium.

As Recupero, who is a facetious and an agreeable companion, was kind enough to fit a good

good deal with me during my confinement, I have gathered many remarks from his conversation, that may be perhaps be worthy of your attention.

The variety of waters about Ætna, he tells me is surprising. I have already mentioned the Fiume Freddo, of the river or Acis: Recupero confirms what I had been told of it. There is a lake on the north of the mountain, of about three miles in circumference, which receives several considerable rivers; yet, although there is no apparent outlet, it never overflows its banks. I suggested the probabilty of a subterraneous communication betwixt this and the Fiume Freddo. He said there was no resemblance in the quality of their waters; however, I think it is probable, that in a course of so many miles, through the caverns of Ætna, full of salts and minerals, it may acquire both its cold and its vitriolic qualities.

There is another lake on the top of a mountain to the west of Ætna, the bottom of which could never be found. It is observed never to rise or fall, but always to preserve the same level. It is undoubtedly the crater of that mountain (which is all of burnt matter) converted into a lake. The river which supplies the baths of Catania is of a very different nature: It never continues the same, but is perpetually changing. Its current is for the most part confined under ground by the lavas; but sometimes it bursts out with such violence, that the city has suffered greatly from it; and what is still more unfortunate, these eruptions are generally followed

lowed by ſome epidemical diſtemper. It has now been conſtantly diminiſhing for theſe two years paſt, and is at preſent almoſt reduced to nothing. They are in perpetual dread of its breaking out, and laying waſte their fields, as it has ſo often done before. What is ſingular, it generally burſts out after a long tract of the drieſt and warmeſt weather. The Ætnean academy have never been able to account for this circumſtance. I think it is moſt probable that it ariſes from the melting of the ſnow of Ætna, but I ſhall not pretend to ſay how.—Theſe, perhaps, overfilling the caverns that uſually receive their water, the ſurplus is carried off into this river.

The river of Alcantara certainly takes its riſe from the melting of theſe ſnows. Its waters, I obſerved, are of the ſame whitiſh colours as all the rivers are that run from the Glacieres amongſt the Alps. There are ſeveral periodical ſprings on Ætna, that flow only during the day, and ſtop during the night. Theſe are naturally and eaſily accounted for from the melting of the ſnow; for it melts only during the day, being hard frozen every night, even in the hotteſt ſeaſon. There are likewiſe a variety of poiſonous ſprings, ſome of ſo deadly a quality, that birds and beaſts have been found lying dead on their banks, from having drunk of their water. But (what is perhaps ſtill more ſingular) Recupero told me, that about twenty years ago, a rent opened in the mountain, that for a conſiderable time ſent forth ſo mephitic a vapour, that

that, like the lake Avernus, birds were suffocated in flying over it.

There are many caverns where the air is so extremely cold, that it is impossible to support it for any time. These the peasants make use of as reservoirs for the snow; and indeed they make the finest ice-houses in the world, preserving it hard frozen during the hottest summers. It would be endless to give an account of all the caverns, and other curious appearances about Ætna. Kircher speaks of a cave which he saw, capable, he says, of containing 30,000 men. Here, he adds, numbers of people have been lost from their temerity in going too far. One of these caverns still retains the name of Proserpine, from its being supposed by the ancients, the passage by which Pluto conveyed her into his dominions; on this occasion Ovid describes Ceres, as searching for her daughter, with two trees which she had plucked from the mountain, and lighted by way of torches. These he calls Teda, which is still the name of a tree I have seen no where but on mount Ætna. It produces a great quantity of rosin, and was surely the most proper tree Ceres could have pitched upon for her purpose. The rosin is called *Catalana*, and is esteemed a cure for sores.

I have mentioned the great variety of flowers, trees, &c. on mount Ætna. I have found a long list of them in Massa; but as I am not acquainted with their Sicilian names, I can make little out of it. I have engaged a person here to procure me a collection of their seeds in

 the

the ſeaſon. I find of the number, the cinnamon, ſarſaparilla, ſaſſafras, rhubarb, and many others that I thought had not been natives of Europe. The Palma Chriſti too, that plant ſo much celebrated of late, from the ſeed of which the caſtor oil is made, grows both here and in many other places of Sicily, in the greateſt abundance. Our botaniſts have called it Ricinus Americanus, ſuppoſing it only to be produced in that part of the world. A Bath phyſician, I remember, has lately written a treatiſe on this plant, and the virtues of the oil extracted from its ſeed, which he makes a ſort of Catholicon. You may believe we ſhall not leave Sicily without providing ourſelves with a quantity of this precious ſeed.

Mount Ætna, I find, is as much celebrated by the ancients as the moderns, for the variety of its odoriferous productions. Plutarch ſays, their ſmell was ſo ſtrong, that on many places of the mountain it was impoſſible to hunt. I ſhall tranſcribe the paſſage as it is before me in an old tranſlation I have borrowed: "Circum Ætnam in Sicilia neminen ferunt cum canibus venatum iri; quia enim multos perpetuo illic ut in viridario prata, colleſque flores mittunt a fragrantia, quæ eam oram occupat, obfuſcare ferarum anhelationes, &c." Ariſtotle has likewiſe a paſſage to the very ſame purpoſe; but this may ſuffice.

There were formerly a variety of wild beaſts in the woody regions of Ætna; but notwithſtanding this advantage they had over the dogs and hunters, the number of theſe is now greatly

ly reduced.—They have ſtill however, the wild boar, the roe-buck, and a kind of wild goat; but the race of ſtags, which was much celebrated, as well as that of bears, is thought to be extinct. Several places of the mountain are ſtill named from thoſe animals.

The horſes and cattle of mount Ætna were eſteemed the beſt in Sicily. The cattle are ſtill of a large ſize, and horns of ſuch a length, that they are preſerved as curioſities in ſome muſeums. The horſes, I am afraid, have degenerated.

There are ſaid to be quantities of porcupines and land tortoiſes on ſome parts of Ætna; but we had not the good fortune to meet with any of them. Neither did we ſee any eagles or vultures, which are likewiſe ſaid to be inhabitants of this mountain.

The accounts given of Mount Ætna by the old Sicilian authors, (ſeveral of whom I have borrowed from Recupero) are very various. Some of them deſcribe the hollow of the crater as being ſeven or eight miles in circumference, ſome make it five, and others only three: And probably all of them are right; for I find, by all their accounts, that generally once in about 100 years, the whole crater has fallen down into the bowels of the mountain: That in proceſs of time, a new crater is ſeen peeping out of the gulph; which perpetually increaſing by the matter thrown up, is by degrees raiſed again to its ancient height, till at laſt becoming too heavy for its hollow foundations, it again gives way, and at once ſinks down into the mountain.

 This

This happened about 100 years ago, in the year 1669, as recorded by Borelli, whofe account of it I have before me. "Univerfam cacumen, quod ad inftar speculæ, feu turris, ad ingentem altitudinem elevabatur, quod una cum vafta planitie arenofa depreffa, atque abforpta eft in profundam voraginem," &c. The fame likewife happened in the year 1536, as recorded by Fazzello and Filoteo, and in the year 1444, 1329, and 1157. Of all thefe I have read an account; but probably betwixt the two laft mentioned, there has been another that is not recorded, as the intervals betwixt all the reft are pretty nearly equal.

Some of them give a dreadful account of it. Folcando, one of their hiftorians, tells us, it fhook the whole ifland, and refounded through all its fhores. And their poet Errico fays, on the fame occafion.

"*S'ode il fuo gran mugito*
Per mille piagge e lidi."

"The bellowing dire a thoufand lands refound,
Whofe trembling fhores return the dreadful
found."

In all probability, this event will very foon happen, as the circumference of the crater is no where recorded to have been reduced to lefs than three miles; and Recupero fays, it is at prefent only three miles and a half; befides, 100 years, the common period, has now elapfed fince its laft fall.

There are many ftories of people perifhing by their temerity, in being too curious fpectators

tors of the eruptions of this mountain; but there are ſtill many more, of thoſe that have been miraculouſly ſaved by the interpoſition of ſome ſaint or virgin, who are ſuppoſed to be in a perpetual ſtate of warfare with the devils in mount Ætna. That part of the iſland where Ætna ſtands, has ever been named *il Val Demoni*, from the frequent apparitions of theſe devils. It makes one third of the iſland. The other two are named the *Val di Noto*, and the *Val di Mazzaro*.

There is one ſtory, though a very old one, that is ſtill related at Catania; it is taken notice of by Seneca, Ariſtotle, Strabo, and others. In the time of a great eruption, when the fire was pouring down upon the city, and every one was carrying off his moſt valuable effects; two rich brothers named *Anſinomus* and *Anapias*, neglecting all their wealth, eſcaped from the conflagration with their aged parents on their backs. Theſe authors add, that the fire reſpecting ſuch filial piety, ſpared them, whilſt many others that took the ſame road were conſumed.

This action has been wonderfully extolled, and proves, I think, that feats of this kind were by no means common in thoſe days.—Now, pray, don't you think, in the world at preſent, bad as it is ſuppoſed to be, there are few ſons, who would not have acted in the ſame manner? and ſure I am, the reſt of mankind would not have made ſuch a fuſs about it. Humanity, and natural affection, I believe, in thoſe ages we are inclined to extol ſo much, were not by many degrees ſo powerful as they are at preſent.—

 Even

Even the pious Æneas himſelf, one of the moſt renowned of all their heroes, was in effect but a ſavage, notwithſtanding all that Virgil ſays to perſuade us of the contrary; for you find him ſacrificing his weak and captive enemies, at the ſame time that he is canting and preaching up piety and juſtice.

Theſe two brothers were ſo celebrated for this action, that there was a diſpute betwixt Syracuſe and Catania, which of theſe cities had given them birth; and temples were erected in both of them, dedicated to Filial Piety, in memory of the event.

In the accounts of the more recent deſtructions of Catania there occurs no inſtance of this ſort.—We find them only lamenting the loſs of prieſts and nuns, and very much out of humour at their ſaints, for allowing the devils to get the better of them. I have been a good deal entertained with ſome of thoſe authors.—Selvaggio, one of the poets, ſpeaking of the terrible earthquake in the year 1169, that deſtroyed Catania, and buried multitudes of people in the ruins, deſcribes it in the following manner, which may ſerve as a ſpecimen of the poetry of that time.

"Cataneam doleo, dolor eſt miſerabile dictu!
Clara potens antiqua fuit; plebe, milite, clero;
Divitiis, auro, ſpecie, virtue, triumphis.
Heu terræ motu ruit illa potentia rerum:
Morte ruit juvenis, moritur vir, ſponſa, maritus,
Unde ſuperbit homo? Deus una diruit hora
Turres, ornatus, veſtes, cunctoſque paratus.

In

In tanto gemitu periit pars maxima gentis,
Proh dolor! et monachi quadraginta quatuor
et plus:
Et periit paſtor patriæ, pater ipſe Johannes
Pontificalis honor, lux regni ſic periere,

But another, Guſtanavilla, one of their hiſtorians, gives a very different account of this affair; as it is likewiſe ſomewhat curious in its way, I ſhall copy it for your amuſement: "In omnem terram, et in fines orbis, terræ jam exiit plaga illa, qua nuper in Sicilia percuſſi ſunt Catanenſes in vigilia B. Agathæ; cum epiſcopus ille damnatiſſimus, qui, ſicut ſcitis, ſibi ſumpſit honorem, non vocatus a Domino, tanquam Aaron, et qui ad ſedem illam, non electione canonica, ſed Giezitica venalitate intrivat; cum, inquam abominationis offerret incenſum, intonuit de cœle Dominus, et ecce terræ motus factus eſt magnus; angelus enim Domini percutiens epiſcopum in furore Domini cum populo, et univerſa civitate ſubvertit."

He adds, that if St Agatha's veil had not been produced, the angel of the Lord was in ſuch a fury, that he would not have left one ſoul alive.

There is a curious painting of the great eruption 1669, in the cathedral of this place. It is but indifferently painted, but gives a dreadful idea of that event. Borelli, who was upon the ſpot, deſcribes it.—He ſays, on the 11th of March, ſome time before the lava burſt out, after violent earthquakes and dreadful ſubterraneous bellowing, a rent was opened in the mountain twelve miles

miles long; in ſome places of which, when they threw down ſtones, they could not hear them ſtrike the bottom. He ſays, that burning rocks, ſixty palms in length, were thrown to the diſtance of a mile; and that the giants, ſuppoſed to be buried under mount Ætna, ſeemed to have renewed their war againſt heaven: That ſtones of a leſſer ſize were carried upwards of three miles; and that the thunder and lightning from the ſmoke, was ſcarce leſs terrible than the noiſe of the mountain. He adds, that after the moſt violent ſtruggles and ſhaking of the whole iſland, when the lava at laſt burſt through, it ſprung up into the air to the height of ſixty palms.—In ſhort, he deſcribes that event, as well as the univerſal terror and conſternation it occaſioned, in terms full of horror.—For many weeks the ſun did not appear, and the day ſeemed to be changed into night.—Soon after the lava got vent, which was not till four months from the time that the mountain began to labour, all theſe dreadful ſymptoms abated, and it was ſoon perfectly quiet.

He ſays, this deluge of fire, after deſtroying the fineſt country in Sicily, and ſweeping away churches, villages, and convents, broke over the lofty walls of Catania, and covered up five of its baſtions with the intervening curtains. From thence pouring down on the city, it deſtroyed every object it met with, overwhelming and burying all in one promiſcuous ruin.

What he regrets moſt, was ſome precious remains of antiquity; the names, the ſituation, and even the memory of whoſe exiſtence, is now loſt

loſt in the place. He mentions an amphitheatre, which he calls *Colliſeo*, the *Circus Maximus*, the *Naumachia* and ſeveral temples.

An account of this great eruption was ſent to Charles II. by Lord Winchelſea, who was then returning from his embaſſy at Conſtantinople, and ſtopped here on purpoſe to ſee ſo remarkable an event. But his lordſhip has not been at that pains to examine it we could have wiſhed. His curioſity was ſatisfied in one day; and he ſeems to have been contented only to look at the lava at a great diſtance; but did not think of examining its ſource, or aſcending the mountain, although at that time all the moſt formidable circumſtances of the eruption were already over.

I ſhould not finiſh this account of mount Ætna, without ſaying ſomething of the various fables and allegories to which it has given riſe; but it would probably lead me into too vaſt a field, and give this more the air of a diſſertation than a letter or a journal. Theſe you will eaſily recollect. They have afforded ample employment for the muſe, in all ages, and in all languages; and indeed the philoſopher and natural hiſtorian have found, in the real properties of this mountain, as ample a fund of ſpeculation, as the poets have done in the fictitious.—It is ſo often mentioned by the ancient writers, that it has been ſaid of Ætna as well as of Greece:

"Nullum eſt ſine nomine ſaxum."

Indeed, I am afraid this ſaying was much more applicable to it formerly than it is at preſent; for

for we even found ſeveral large mountains that had no name; and it does not at all appear, that the number of philoſophers in Sicily have by any means increaſed in the later ages. Their ambition is now changed; and if they can get a ſaint to keep the devils of Ætna in order, they trouble themſelves very little about the cauſe of its operations; and do not value their iſland half ſo much for having given birth to Archimedes or Empedocles, as to St Agatha and St Roſalia.

The ancients as well as the moderns, ſeem ever to have conſidered Ætna as one of the higheſt mountains on the globe. There are many paſſages in their authors that ſhew this; though perhaps, none more ſtrongly than their making Deucalion and Pyrrha take refuge on the top of it, to ſave themſelves from the univerſal deluge*.

I ſhall now conclude this long account of mount Ætna with Virgil's celebrated deſcription of it in the third Æneid, which has been ſo much admired. You may compare it with the following deſcription of the famous poet Raitano, held, I aſſure you, in full as high eſtimation by the Sicilians,

"Nel mezzo verſo l'ethere avviccina
Ætna la fronte ſua cinta di orrori,
E con iſpavantevole rovina.

Rimbomba

* Cataclyſmus, quod nos diluvium dicimus, cum factus eſt, omne genus humanum interiit præter Deucalionem et Pyrrham, qui in montem Ætnam qui altiſſimus in Sicilia eſſe dicitur fugerunt, &c. HIGINUS.

Rimbomba, e con orribili fragori.
Soventi negri nubi al ciel deſtina
Fumanti di atro turbine, e di ardori,
Ergi globbi di fiamma, e ſu lambiſce
Le ſtelle ornai con infuocate ſtriſcie;
Scogli, e divelte viſcere di monte
Erruttando tal volta avido eſtolle;
E con gemiti vomita, e con onte
Liquifatti macigni, e in fondo bolle."

So ſings the Sicilian muſe:—you will not however heſitate to give the preference to the Roman one, although the former is evidently ſtolen from her.

"———Horrificis juxta tona Ætna ruinis,
Interdumque atram promrumpit ad æthera nubem,
Turbine fumantem piceo et candente favilla,
Attolitque globos flammarum, et ſidera lambit.
Interdumque ſcopulos, avoſaque viſcera montis
Erigit eructans, liquefactaque ſaxa ſub auras
Cum gemitu glomerat, fundoque exæſtuat imo."

But both theſe have been greatly outdone by the wonderful imagination of our great countryman Sir Richard Blackmore; who accounts at once for the whole phenomena of Ætna, by the ſimple idea of giving the mountain a fit of a cholic: A thought that had eſcaped all the poets and philoſophers of antiquity, and ſeems for ever to have been preſerved for the profound genius of this great maſter and father of the Bathos.—I have forgot the paſſage: but you will find it I think in Prince Arthur.

The

The philofophical poet Lucretius, has likewife mentioned the eruptions of mount Ætna; but Pindar is the oldeft poet we know of, that has taken any notice of them. His defcription is, I think, the moft fatisfactory of all, and conveys a clearer idea both of the mountain itfelf, and an eruption of the mountain, than either the Roman or Sicilian poet, though it is not near fo much laboured, nor worked up with all that variety of circumftances, they have found means to introduce. Its greateft fault is, that Pindar had ftill kept in view that abfurd idea of the ancients, that Jupiter had buried the giants under mount Ætna; and that their ftruggling to get loofe, was the caufe of its eruptions: But even this he touches but flightly, as if afhamed to give fuch a reafon. The paffage is tranflated into Englifh by Mr Weft.

"Now under fmoking Cuma's fulph'rous coaft
And vaft Sicilia, lies his tortur'd breaft,
By fnowy Ætna nurfe of endlefs froft,
The mighty prop of heaven for ever preft,
Forth from whofe flaming caverns iffuing rife
Tremendous fountains of pure liquid fire,
Which veil in ruddy mifts the noon-day fkies,
While wrapt in fmoke the eddying flames afpire;
Or gleaming thro' the night with hideous roar,
Far o'er the redd'ning main huge rocky fragments pour."

This paffage decides what has been much difputed, that Ætna was, in thefe early ages, of as great an elevation as at prefent. It has been alledged,

alledged, that volcanoes always increaſe in height till they are extinguiſhed, when they are ſuppoſed to moulder down, and by degrees ſink into the caverns that are below them, like the aſtruni, and the ſolfaterra at Naples: However we find that Ætna was at that time as now, covered with eternal ſnows, and was ſuppoſed, like Atlas, to be one of the great props of heaven. But what pleaſes me the moſt in this deſcription is, that it proves beyond the poſſibility of a doubt, that in theſe very remote eruptions, it was common for the lavas of Ætna to run a great way out to ſea.—The concluſion I think, is fully as juſt, and perhaps not leſs ſublime, than the "avolſaque viſcera montis erigit eructans" of Virgil, which, I muſt own, I think rather comes too near Sir Richard's fit of cholic.

Thucydides ſpeaks of three eruptions of this mountain; but is not ſo particular as we could have wiſhed. He does not mention the date of the firſt; but ſays, it was the earlieſt after the arrival of the Greeks in Sicily. The ſecond happened about the time of the 78th Olympiad, and the laſt in that of the 88th, which was nearly about the period when Pindar wrote; ſo that we cannot doubt that his deſcription is taken from the accounts he had heard of ſome of thoſe eruptions, the circumſtances of which, no doubt, at that time, had afforded matter of converſation all over Greece.

I think we may now try to take leave of Ætna, though I am afraid, during the remainder of our expedition, we ſhall meet with nothing worthy to ſucceed it.—We ſhall ſail from hence to-

morrow morning; and expect to ſleep at Syracuſe, as it is only about fifty miles diſtant. I ſhall write to you again from the ruins of that celebrated city. Farewel.

Ever yours.

LETTER XII.

Syracuſe, June, 1ſt.

ON the 31ſt of May, we embarked on board a felucca, and ſet ſail for the mighty Syracuſe.—The wind was favourable, and for ſome time we went at a great rate. The view of mount Ætna, for the whole of this little voyage, is wonderfully fine, and the bold black coaſt formed for near thirty miles, of the lava of that immenſe volcano, gives the moſt awful idea of its eruptions. There is no part of this coaſt nearer than thirty miles to its ſummit; and yet there has hardly been any great eruption, where the lava has not reached the ſea, and driven back its waters to a great diſtance, leaving high rocks and promontories, that for ever ſet its waves at defiance, and preſcribe their utmoſt limits. What a tremendous ſcene muſt the meeting betwixt theſe adverſe elements have formed?

We may eaſily conceive the variety of changes this coaſt has undergone in the ſpace of ſome thouſands of years, as every great eruption muſt have made a conſiderable difference.—Virgil is wonderfully minute and exact in his geography of Sicily; and this is the only part of the iſland that

that ſeems to be materially altered ſince his time. He ſays there was a large port at the foot of Ætna, where ſhips were ſecure from every wind;

"Portus ab acceſſu ventorum immotus et ingens;"

of which, at preſent, there are not the leaſt remains. It is probably the ſame that was called by the Sicilians the port of Ulyſſes; which is often mentioned by their writers.—The place of its exiſtence is ſtill ſhewn betwixt three and four miles up the country, amongſt the lavas of Ætna. However, I can ſee no ſort of reaſon why they have called this the port of Ulyſſes: For ſurely Homer does not bring his heroe near the precincts of mount Ætna. Indeed I think it is evident, that this volcano did not burn during the time of Homer, nor for ſome ages preceding it, otherwiſe it is not poſſible, that he would have ſaid ſo much of Sicily, without taking any notice of ſo great and capital an object, which, of all others, the daring and ſublime imagination of Homer would have been the moſt eager to graſp at.—It is evident from his account, that Ulyſſes landed at the weſt end of Sicily, oppoſite to the iſland of Lachaea, now Favignana, almoſt two hundred miles diſtant from this port. Virgil, with more judgment lands his hero at the foot of Ætna, which gives him an opportunity of introducing ſome of the fineſt deſcriptions in the Æneid. But it is ſomewhat odd, that here he makes Æneas find one of Ulyſſes's companions, who had eſcaped the rage of Polyphemus, and had lived for ſeveral months in

the woods and caverns of this mountain.—Virgil muft have been aware of this impropriety, as he well knew that Homer had landed Ulyffes, and placed the cave of Polyphemus at the moft diftant point of the ifland. But he could not prevail on himfelf to pafs mount Ætna. He was fo thoroughly convinced, that this was the moft proper landing-place for an epic hero, as well as the moft proper habitation for the Cyclops, that, by a bold poetical licence, he has fairly taken it for granted, that Homer really made it fo. Indeed, in this paffage, the pleafure he affords to the imagination of his reader, makes an ample amends for his having impofed on his judgment. But to return to our voyage.

The view of the mountain from the fea is more complete and fatisfactory than any where on the ifland. The eye takes in a greater portion of the circle, and you obferve, with more diftinctnefs, how it rifes equally on all fides, from its immenfe bafe, overfpread with the beautiful little mountains I have mentioned; and at once can trace the progrefs of vegetation from its utmoft luxuriance, to where it is checked by the two extremes of heat and cold.—The different regions of the mountain are diftinctly marked out, by their different colours, and different productions; expofing at once to the ravifhed eye every climate, and every feafon, with all their variety;

"Where bloffoms, fruits, and flowers together rife,
"And the whole year in gay confufion lies."

Th

The firſt region exhibits every object that characteriſes ſummer and autumn; the ſecond thoſe of the moſt delightful ſpring; the third, an eternal and unrelenting winter; and the fourth, to complete the contraſt, the regions of unextinguiſhable fire.

The circumference of the great baſe of Ætna, Recupero told me, he had been at a good deal of pains to aſcertain; as it had generally been computed at only a hundred miles, or little more, although the radii of that circle had ever been eſteemed at 30 of thoſe miles; an abſurdity in computation that had put him upon making this inquiry. The reſult was, that taking the ſuppoſed diſtance of one place from another, all the way round, the ſum of the whole amounted to one hundred and eighty three miles: an immenſe circle ſurely, and which is ſtill enlarged by every conſiderable eruption. The whole of this circle is formed of lava and burnt matter; and I have obſerved, that near the very outermoſt borders of it, there have been many little eruptions that have pierced through ſome of the thickeſt lavas of Ætna. The ſmall eruptions, at ſo vaſt a diſtance from the great furnace of the mountain, are probably occaſioned by the intenſe heat of the lava, which continues for many years rarifying the air, in the caverns it has run over, which burſting forth from its priſon, the lava ſinks down, and kindling the ſulphur and nitre with which theſe caverns are filled, exhibits in miniature the phenomena of a great eruption.

There is a large ſandy beach that extends from

from the mouth of the river Simetus, a great way to the ſouth of Catania, and was probably continued the whole way to the foot of the mountain of Taurominium, (where there are ſtill remains of the eaſt end of it) till it was broken in upon many thouſand years ago, by the lavas of Ætna; which, from a flat ſandy ſhore, have now converted it into a high, bold, black iron coaſt. What is a ſtrong proof of this;—in many places where they have ſunk deep wells; after piercing through the lava, they have at laſt come to beds of ſhells and ſea ſand.

There is nothing elſe very intereſting in the voyage from Catania to Syracuſe. If you will read the concluſion of the 3d book of the Æneid, you will find a much better deſcription of it than any I can give you. The coaſt lies low, and, except Ætna, there are no very ſtriking objects.

We paſſed the mouths of ſeveral rivers: The firſt and moſt conſiderable is the Giarretta, or river of St Paul formerly the Simetus; and under that name celebrated by the poets. The nymph Thalia, after her amour with Jupiter, is ſuppoſed to have been changed into this ſtream: and, to avoid the reſentment of Juno, ſunk under ground near mount Ætna, and continued her ſubterraneous courſe to the ſea. This river was navigable in the time of the Romans, and, Maſſa ſays, the only one of the iſland that was ſo. —It takes its riſe on the north ſide of Ætna, and ſurrounding the weſt ſkirts of the mountain, falls into the ſea near the ruins of the ancient Morgantio. It no longer ſinks under ground

as

as it did formerly; but it is now celebrated for a quality it does not appear to have poſſeſſed in the times of antiquity, as none of the old writers take notice of it. It throws up near its mouth great quantities of fine amber: This is carefully gathered by the peaſants in the neighbourhood, and brought to Catania, where it is manufactured into the form of croſſes, beads, ſaints, &c. and is ſold at high prices to the ſuperſtitious people on the continent. We bought ſeveral of theſe reſpectable figures, and found them electrical in a high degree; powerfully attracting feathers, ſtraws, and other light bodies; ſomewhat emblematical, you will ſay, of what they repreſent.—Some pieces of this amber contain flies and other inſects curiouſly preſerved in its ſubſtance; and we were not a little entertained with the ingenuity of one of the artiſts, who has left a large blue-bottle-fly, with its wings expanded, exactly over the head of a ſaint, to repreſent, he told us, *lo ſpirito ſanto* deſcending upon him. I have got ſome fine pieces of this amber, more electric, I think, and emitting a ſtronger ſmell, than that which comes from the Baltic. The generation of this ſubſtance has long been a controverted point amongſt naturaliſts; nor do I believe it is as yet aſcertained, whether it is a ſea or a land production. It is generally ſuppoſed to be a kind of gum or bitumen, that iſſues from the earth in a liquid ſtate, at which time the flies and other inſects that light upon it are caught, and by their ſtruggles to get looſe, ſoon work themſelves into its ſubſtance, which hardening round them, they are for ever preſerved

preserved in the greateſt perfection. Large fine pieces are conſtantly found at the mouth of the Simetus, ſuppoſed to have been brought down by the river; but it is ſingular, that none of it is ever found any where but on the ſeaſhore. They have here likewiſe a kind of artificial amber, made, I am told, from copal; but it is very different from the natural.

Not far from the mouth of this river there are two of the largeſt lakes in Sicily; the Beviere, and the Pantana; the firſt of which is ſuppoſed to have been made by Hercules; in conſequence of which it was held ſacred by the ancients. They are full of a variety of fiſh; one ſpecies of which, called Molletti, is much eſteemed: the ſalting and exportation of theſe makes a conſiderable branch of their commerce at Leontini, which is in that neighbourhood: that city is one of the moſt ancient in the iſland, and is ſuppoſed to have been the habitation of the Leſtrigons.

The Leontine fields have been much famed for their fertility: Both Diodorus and Pliny aſſert that they yielded wheat an hundred-fold, and that grain grew ſpontaneouſly here without culture: But this was only during the reign of Ceres, and is not now the caſe.

In a few hours ſailing we came in ſight of the city of Auguſta, which is beautifully ſituated in a ſmall iſland that was formerly a peninſula; It was therefore called by the Greeks Cherſoneſus. Both the city and the fortifications ſeem conſiderable, and are ſaid to contain about 9000 inhabitants. The ruins of the Little

Hybla, so celebrated for its honey, lie within a few miles of this place.

Some time before our arrival at Syracuse, it was a dead calm, and we spied a fine turtle fast asleep on the surface of the water. Our pilot ordered a profound silence, and only two oars to row very gently, that if possible we might surprise him.—Every thing was put in order, and two men were placed ready at the prow to secure the prize.—We were all attention and expectation, and durst hardly breathe for fear of disturbing him.

We moved slowly on, and the turtle lay stone still: the two men bent down their bodies, and had their arms already in the water to seize him.—No alderman, with all deference be it spoken, ever beheld his turtle upon the table with more pleasure and security; nor feasted his imagination more lusciously upon the banquet.—He was already our own in idea, and we were only thinking of the various ways in which he should be dressed:—When—how vain and transitory are all human possessions! the turtle made a plunge, slipped through their fingers, and disappeared in a moment, and with him all our hopes.—We looked very foolish at each other, without uttering a word, till Fullarton asked me in the most provoking manner, whether I would chuse a little of the callipash or the callipee. The two men shrugged up their shoulders, and said *Pazienza;* but Glover told them in a rage, that all the pazienza on earth was not equal to a good turtle.

Soon after this, the remains of the great Syracuse

racufe appeared; the remembrance of w glory, magnificence, and illuftrious deeds b in arts and arms, made us for fome time ev forget our turtle. But, alas! how are mighty fallen! This proud city, that vied w Rome itfelf, is now reduced to a heap of ru bifh; for what remains of it deferves not name of a city. We rowed round the great part of its walls without feeing a human cr ture; thofe very walls that were the terror the Roman arms; from whence Archime battered their fleets, and with his engines l ed their veffels out of the fea, and dafhed th againft the rocks. We found the interior p of the city agreed but too well with its exte appearance. There was not an inn to be fou and after vifiting all the monafteries and gious fraternities in fearch of beds, we fo the whole of them fo wretchedly mean and ty, that we preferred at laft to fleep on ftr but even that we could not have clean, but w eat up with vermin of every kind.

We had letters for the Count Gaetano, made an apology that he could not lodge but in other refpects fhewed us many civilit particularly in giving us the ufe of his carri in explaining the ruins, in pointing out thing that was worthy of our attention; likewife in giving us letters of recommend for Malta. He is a gentleman of good f and has written feveral treatifes on the ant ties of Sicily.

Of the four cities that compofed the an Syracufe, there remains only Ortigia, by n

R. Scott sculpt.

VIEW OF THE AQUEDUCT AND PART OF THE THEATRE AT SYRACUSA.

the ſmalleſt, ſituated in the iſland of that name. It is about two miles round, and is ſuppoſed to contain about 14000 inhabitants. The ruins of the other three, Tycha, Achradina, and Neapoli, are computed at twenty-two miles in circumference, but almoſt the whole of this ſpace is now converted into rich vineyards, orchards, and corn-fields; the walls of theſe are indeed every where built with broken marbles full of engravings and inſcriptions, but moſt of them defaced and ſpoiled. The principal remains of antiquity are a theatre and amphitheatre; many ſepulchres, the Latomie, the Catacombs, and the ear of Dionyſius, which it was impoſſible to deſtroy.—The Latomie now makes a noble ſubterraneous garden, and is indeed one of the moſt beautiful and romantic ſpots I ever beheld. Moſt of it is about 100 feet below the level of the earth, and of an incredible extent. The whole is hewn out of a rock as hard as marble, compoſed of a concretion of ſhells, gravel, and other marine bodies. The bottom of this immenſe quarry, from whence probably the greateſt part of Syracuſe was built, is now covered with an exceeding rich ſoil; and as no wind from any point of the compaſs can touch it, it is filled with a great variety of the fineſt ſhrubs and fruit-trees, which bear with vaſt luxuriance, and are never blaſted. The oranges, citrons, bergamots, pomegranates, figs, &c. are all of a remarkable ſize and fine quality. Some of theſe trees, but more particularly the olives, grow out of the hard rock: where there is no viſible

viſible ſoil; and exhibit a very uncommon and pleaſing appearance.

There is a variety of wild and romantic ſcenes in this curious garden; in the midſt of which we were ſurpriſed by the appearance of a figure under one of the caverns, that added greatly to the dignity and ſolemnity of the place.—It was that of an aged man, with a long flowing white beard that reached down to his middle. His old wrinkled face and ſcanty grey locks pronounced him a member of ſome former age as well as of this. His hands which were ſhook by the palſy, held a ſort of pilgrim's ſtaff; and about his neck there was a ſtring of large beads with a crucifix hanging to its end.—Had it not been for theſe marks of his later exiſtence, I don't know but I ſhould have aſked him, whether, in his youth, he had not been acquainted with Theocritus and Archimedes, and if he did not remember the reign of Dionyſius the tyrant. But he ſaved us the trouble, by telling us he was the hermit of the place, and belonged to a convent of Capuchins on the rock above; that he had now bid adieu to the upper world, and was determined to ſpend the reſt of his life in this ſolitude, in prayer for the wretched mortals that inhabit it.

This figure together with the ſcene in which it appears, are indeed admirably well adapted, and reflect a mutual dignity upon each other. We left ſome money upon the rock:—For the Capuchins, who are the greateſt beggars on earth, never touch money, but ſave their too tender conſciences, and preſerve their vows unbroken

broken, by the ſimple device of lifting it with a pair of pincers, and carrying it to the market in their ſack or cowl. This I have ſeen more than once.—We were much delighted with the Latomie, and left it with regret: It is the very ſame that has been ſo much celebrated by Cicero about 1800 years ago: "Opus eſt ingens (he ſays) magnificum regum, ac tyrannorum. Totum ex ſaxo in mirandam altitudinem depreſſo," &c. A little to the weſt of it is ſuppoſed to have ſtood the country-houſe, the ſale of which you ſtill remember he gives ſo lively and pleaſant an account of; by which a gold-ſmith (I have forgot his name) cheated a Roman nobleman in a very ingenious manner.

The ear of Dionyſius is no leſs a monument of the ingenuity and magnificence, than of the cruelty of that tyrant. It is a huge cavern cut out of the hard rock, in the form of the human ear. The perpendicular height of it is about 80 feet, and the length of this enormous ear is not leſs than 250. The cavern was ſaid to be contrived ſo, that every ſound made in it, was collected and united into one point, as into a focus; this was called the Tympanum; and exactly oppoſite to it the tyrant has made a ſmall hole, which communicated with a little apartment where he uſed to conceal himſelf. He applied his own ear to this hole, and is ſaid to have heard diſtinctly every word that was ſpoken in the cavern below. This apartment was no ſooner finiſhed, and a proof of it made, than he put to death all the workmen that had been employed in it. He then confined all that he

fufpected were his enemies; and by overhearing their converfation judged of their guilt, and condemned and acquitted accordingly.

As this chamber of Dionyfius is very high in the rock, and now totally inacceffible, we had it not in our power to make proof of this curious experiment, which our guides told us had been done fome years ago by the captain of an Englifh fhip.

The echo in the ear is prodigious; much fuperior to any other cavern I have feen. The holes in the rock, to which the prifoners were chained, ftill remain, and even the lead and iron in feveral of them. We furprifed a poor young porcupine who had come here to drink, of whom our guides made a lawful prize.—Near to this are caverns of a great extent, where they carry on a manufactory of nitre, which is found in vaft abundance on the fides of thefe caves.

The amphitheatre is in the form of a very excentric ellipfe, and is much ruined; but the theatre is fo entire, that moft of the gradini or feats ftill remain. Both thefe are in that part of the city that was called Neapoli, or the New City. "Quarta autum eft urbs (fays Cicero) quæ quia poftrema ædificata eft, Neapolis nominatur, quam ad fumm[illegible] thea[illegible]rum eft maximum, &c." However, it is but a fmall theatre in comparifon of that of Taurominum. We fearchedamongft the fepulchres, feveral of which are very elegant, for that of Archimedes; but could fee nothing refembling it.—At his own defire it was adorned with the figure of a fphere

inſcribed in a cylinder, but had been loſt by his ungrateful countrymen, even before the time that Cicero was queſtor of Sicily. It is pleaſant to obſerve, with what eagerneſs this great man undertakes the ſearch of it, and with what exultation he deſcribes his triumph on the diſcovery. "Ego autem cum omnia colluſtrarem oculis (eſt enim ad portas Agragianas magna frequentia ſepulchrorum) animadverti columnellam non multum e dumis eminentem, in qua inerat ſphæræ figura et cylindri. Atqua ego ſtatim Syracuſanis (erant autem principes mecum) dixi, me illud ipſum arbitrari eſſe quod quærerem. Immiſſi cum falcibus multi purgarunt, et aperuerunt locum: quo cum patefactus eſſet aditus ad adverſam baſim acceſſimus; apparebat epigramma exeſis poſterioribus partibus verſiculorum dimidiatis fere: Ita nobiliſſima Græciæ civitas, quondam vero etiam doctiſſima ſui civis unius acutiſſimi monumentum ignoraſſet, niſi ab homine Arpinate didiciſſet, &c."

The Catacombs are a great work; little inferior either to thoſe of Rome or Naples, and in the ſame ſtile. There are many remains of temples. The Duke of Mont-albano, who has written on the antiquities of Syracuſe, reckons near twenty; but there is hardly any of theſe that are now diſtinguiſhable. A few fine columns of that of Jupiter Olympius ſtill remain; and the temple of Minerva (now converted into the cathedral of the city, and dedicated to the Virgin) is almoſt entire. They have lately built a new facade to it; but I am afraid they have not improved on the ſimplicity of the antique.

It is full of broken pediments, and I think in a bad ftile.

Ortigia, the only remaining part of Syracufe, was anciently an ifland; it is often denominated fuch by Virgil, Cicero, and many of the Greek and Latin hiftorians. In later ages, and probably by the ruins of this mighty city, the ftrait that feparated it from the continent, was filled up; and it had now been a peninfula for many ages; till the prefent king of Spain, at a vaft expence, cut through the neck of land that joined it to Sicily, and has again reduced it to its primitive ftate.

Here he has raifed a noble fortification, which appears to be almoft impregnable. There are four ftrong gates, one within the other, with each a glacis, covered way, fcarp and counterfcarp, and a broad deep ditch filled with fea-water, and defended by an immenfe number of—embrafures;—but not fo much as one fingle piece of artillery. This you will no doubt think ridiculous enough, but the ridicule is ftill heightened, when I affure you there is not a cannon of any kind belonging to this noble fortrefs, but one fmall battery of fix pounders for faluting fhips that go in and out of the port. If you are at a lofs to account for this, you will pleafe remember that it is a work of the king of Spain. However, the ditches are very ufeful; they are perpetually covered with fifhing-boats; and they can ufe their nets and lines here with the greateft fuccefs, even in the moft ftormy weather; though I dare fay this was none of the motives that induced his majefty to make them. The

nobility

THE FOUNTAIN ARETHUSA at SYRACUSE

nobility of the place have likewiſe barges here, for their amuſement.

As the celebrated fountain of Arethuſa has ever been looked upon as one of the greateſt curioſities of Syracuſe, you may believe we were not a little impatient to examine it: And indeed only by obſerving Cicero's account of it*, we ſoon found it out.—It ſtill exactly anſwers the deſcription he gives, except with regard to the great quantities of fiſh it contained, which ſeem now to have abandoned it.

The fountain of Arethuſa was dedicated to Diana, who had a magnificent temple near it, where great feſtivals were annually celebrated in honour of the goddeſs. We found a number of nymphs, up to the knees in the fountain, buſy waſhing their garments, and we dreaded the fate of Acteon and Alpheus; but if theſe were of Diana's train, they are by no means ſo coy as they were of old; and a man would hardly chuſe to run the riſk of being changed either into a ſtag or a river for the beſt of them.

It is indeed an aſtoniſhing fountain; and riſes at once out of the earth, to the ſize of a river.—The poetical fictions concerning it are too well known to require that I ſhould enumerate them. Many of the people here believe to this day, that it is the identical river Arethuſa, that ſinks under ground near Olympia in Greece, and continuing its courſe for five or ſix hun-

* In hac inſula extrema eſt fons aquæ dulcis, cui nomen Arethuſa eſt, incredibili magnitudine pleniſſimus piſcium, qui fluctu totus operiretur, niſi munitione, ac mole lapidum a mari disjunctus eſſet, &c. Cic.

dred miles below the ocean, riſes again in this ſpot.

It is truly aſtoniſhing that ſuch a ſtory as this ſhould have gained ſuch credit among the ancients, for it is not only their poets, but natural hiſtorians and philoſophers too, that take notice of it. Pliny mentions it more than once; and there are few or none of the Latin poets that it has eſcaped.

This ſtrange belief has been communicated to the Sicilian authors, and, what is amazing, there is hardly any of them that doubts of it.—Pomponius Mela, Pauſanius, Maſſa, and Fazzello, are all of the ſame ſentiments; to ſupport which they tell you the old ſtory of the golden cup [illegible] the Olympic games, which was thrown into the Grecian Arethuſa, and was ſoon after caſt up again by the Sicilian one.

They likewiſe add, that it had always been obſerved that after the great ſacrifices at Olympia, the blood of which fell into that river, the waters of Arethuſa roſe for ſeveral days, tinged with blood.

This, like many modern miracles, was probably a trick of the prieſts.—Thoſe of Diana had the charge of the fountain of Arethuſa, and no doubt were much intereſted to ſupport the credit of the ſtory; for it was that goddeſs that converted the nymph Arethuſa into a river, and conducted her by ſubterraneous paſſages from Greece to Sicily, to avoid the purſuit of Alpheus, who underwent the ſame fate.

At a little diſtance from the fountain of Arethuſa, there is a very large ſpring of freſh water,

ter, that boils up in the sea. It is called *Occhi di Zilica*, and by some Alpheus, who is supposed by the poets to have pursued Arethusa below the sea all the way to Sicily.

As this spring is not taken notice of by any of the great number of the ancients that speak of Arethusa, it is most probable that it did not then exist; and is a part of that fountain that has since burst out before its arrival at the island of Ortigia. Had it been visible in the time of the Greeks, there is no doubt that they would have made use of this, as a strong argument to prove the submarine journey of Arethusa; as it in fact rises at some distance in the sea, and pretty much in the same direction that Greece lies from Ortigia. It sometimes boils up so strongly, that after piercing the salt water, I am told it can be taken up very little affected by it.

Syracuse has two harbours; the largest of which, on the south west side of Ortigia, is reckoned six miles round, and was esteemed one of the best in the Mediterranean. It is said by Diodorus to have run almost into the heart of the city, and was called Marmoreo, because entirely surrounded with buildings of marble; the entry into this harbour was strongly fortified, and the Roman fleets could never penetrate it.

The small port is on the north east of Ortigia, and is likewise recorded to have been highly ornamented. Fazzello says, there is still the remains of a submarine aqueduct, that runs through the middle of it, which was intended to convey the water from the fountain of Arethusa to the other parts of the city.

Near this port, they ſhow the ſpot where Archimedes' houſe ſtood; and likewiſe the tower from whence he is ſaid to have ſet fire to the Roman gallies with his burning glaſſes; a ſtory which is related by ſeveral authors, but which is now almoſt univerſally exploded, from the difficulty to conceive a burning glaſs, or a concave ſpeculum, with a focus of ſuch an immenſe length as this muſt have required.

However, I ſhould be apt to imagine if this be not entirely a fiction, (of which there is ſome probability) that it was neither performed by refracting burning-glaſſes, nor ſpeculums, but only by means of common looking-glaſſes, or very clear plates of metal. Indeed, from the ſituation of the place it muſt have been done by reflection; for Archimedes' tower ſtood on the north of the little port where the Roman fleet are ſaid to have been moored; ſo that their veſſels lay in a right line betwixt him and the ſun at noon; and at a very ſmall diſtance from the wall of the city where this tower ſtood. But if you will ſuppoſe this to have been performed by common burning-glaſſes, or by thoſe of the parabolical kind, it will be neceſſary to raiſe a tower of a moſt enormous height on the iſland of Ortigia, in order to interpoſe theſe glaſſes betwixt the ſun and the Roman gallies; and even this could not have been done till late in the afternoon, when his rays are exceedingly weak. But I have very little doubt that common looking-glaſſes would be found all ſufficient to perform theſe effects.

Let us ſuppoſe that a thouſand of theſe were made

made to reflect the rays to the fame point: the heat in all probability, muft be increafed to a greater degree than in the focus of moft burning-glaffes; and abundantly capable of fetting fire to every combuftible fubftance.—This experiment might be eafily made by means of a battalion of men, arming each with a looking-glafs inftead of a firelock; and fetting up a board at two or three hundred yards diftance for them to fire at. I fuppofe it would take a confiderable time before they were expert at this exercife; but, by practife, I have no doubt that they might all be brought to hit the mark inftantaneoufly at the word of command; like the lark catchers in fome countries, who are fo dextrous at this manœuvre, that with a fmall mirror they throw the rays of light on the lark, let her be never fo high in the air; which, by a kind of fafcination, brings down the poor animal to the fnare.

You may laugh at all this; but I don't think it is impoffible that a looking-glafs may one day be thought as neceffary an implement for a foldier as at prefent it is for a beau. I am very apprehenfive the French will get the ftart of us in this fignal invention; as I have been affured long ago, that few of their men ever go to the field, without firft providing themfelves with one of thefe little warlike engines, the true ufe of which, happily for us, they are as yet unacquainted with. You will eafily perceive, that if this experiment fucceeds, it muft alter the whole fyftem of fortification as well as of attack and defence; for every part of the city

that

that is expofed to the view of the befiegers, may be eafily fet in a flame; and the befieged would have the fame advantage over the camp of the befieging army*.

We are already completely tired of Syracufe, which of all the wretched places we have yet met with, is by many degrees the moft wretched: For befides that its inhabitants are fo extremely poor and beggarly, many of them are fo over-run with the itch, that we are under perpetual apprehenfions, and begin to be extremely well fatisfied that we could not procure beds. It is truly melancholy to think of the difmal contraft that its former magnificence makes with its prefent meannefs. The mighty Syracufe, the moft opulent and powerful of all the Grecian cities, which, by its own proper ftrength alone, was able, at different times, to contend againft all the power of Carthage and Rome:—Which is recorded (what the force of united nations is now incapable of) to have repulfed fleets of two thoufand fail, and armies of two hundred thoufand men; and contained within its own walls, what no city ever did before or fince, fleets and armies that were the terror of the world. This haughty and magnificent city, reduced even below the confequence of the moft infignificant burgh!

* Since the writing of thefe letters, the author has been informed, that Mr Buffon actually made this experiment.—He conftructed a kind of frame, in which were fixed four hundred fmall mirrors, difpofed in fuch a manner, that the rays reflected from each of them fell exactly on the fame point. By means of this he melted lead at the diftance of one hundred and twenty feet, and fet fire to a hay ftack at a much greater diftance.

burgh!—"Sic tranſit gloria mundi."—I have not been able to procure a table to write upon, but by way of ſuccedaneum am obliged to lay a form over the back of two chairs.—We have got into the moſt wretched hovel you can conceive, and the moſt dirty; but what is ſtill worſt of all, we can find nothing to eat; and if we had not brought ſome cold fowls along with us, we might have ſtarved.

The heat has been conſiderably greater here than at Catania. The thermometer is juſt now at 78.—There is an old remark made on the climate of this place by ſome of the ancients; which is ſtill ſaid to hold good: That at no ſeaſon, the ſun has ever been inviſible during a whole day at Syracuſe. I find it mentioned by ſeveral Sicilian authors, but ſhall not vouch for the truth of it.—Adieu.—My next will probably be from Malta; for we ſhall ſail to-morrow, if it be poſſible to procure a veſſel.

Ever yours.

LETTER XIII.

Capo Paſſero, June 3.

AS we found the mighty city of Syracuſe ſo reduced, that it could not afford beds and lodging to three weary travellers, we agreed to abridge our ſtay in it; and accordingly hired a Malteſe Sparonaro to carry us to that iſland: This is a ſmall ſix-oar'd boat, made entirely for ſpeed

ſpeed, to avoid the African pirates, and other Barbareſque veſſels, with which theſe ſeas are infeſted; but ſo flat and ſo narrow, that they are not able to bear any ſea, and of conſequence keep always as near the coaſt as poſſible.

On the 2d of June, by day-break, we left the Marmoreo or great port of Syracuſe; and although the wind was exactly contrary and pretty ſtrong, by the force of their oars, which they manage with great dexterity, we got on at the rate of four miles an hour. They do not pull their oars as we do, but puſh them like the Venetian Gondoliers; always bronting the prow of the boat, and ſeldom or never ſit down when they row; allowing the whole weight of their bodies to be exerted every ſtroke of the oar. This gives a prodigious momentum, and is certainly much more forcible than a ſimple exertion of the muſcles of the arm.

About ten o'clock the wind became favourable, when we went indeed at an immenſe rate. At twelve it blew a hurricane, and with ſome difficulty we got under ſhore, but the wind was ſo exceedingly violent, that even there we had like to have been overſet, and we were obliged to run aground to ſave us from that diſaſter. Here we were a good deal annoyed by the ſand carried about by the wind; however, the hurricane was ſoon over, and we again put to ſea with a favourable gale, which in a few hours carried us to Capo Paſſero.

In this little ſtorm we were a good deal amuſed with the behaviour of our Sicilian ſervant, who at land is a fellow of undaunted courage,

courage, of which we have had many proofs; but here (I don't know why) it entirely forsook him, although there was in fact no real danger, for we never were more than 100 yards from the shore. He gave himself up to despair, and called upon all his saints for protection: And never again recovered his confidence all the rest of this little voyage; perpetually wishing himself back at Naples, and swearing that no earthly temptation should ever induce him to go to sea again. The same fellow but a few days ago, mounted a most viscious horse, and without the least fear or concern galloped along the side of a precipice, where every moment we expected to see him dashed to pieces; so singular and various are the different modes of fear and of courage.

Capo Passero, anciently called Pachinus, is the remotest and most southerly point of Sicily. It is not a peninsula, as represented in all the maps, but a wretched barren island, of about a mile round; with a fort and a small garrison to protect the neighbouring country from the incursions of the Barbary corsairs, who are often very troublesome on this part of the coast. This little island and fort lie about a mile and a half distant from the small creek of which we have taken possession, and are separated from the rest of Sicily by a strait of about half a mile broad.

Our pilot told us that we must not think of Malta, which is almost 100 miles off, till there were more settled appearances of good weather.

As there is no habitation here of any kind, we searched about, till at last we found a small

cavern, where we made a very comfortable dinner. We then ſallied forth to examine the face of the country, as well as to try if we could ſhoot ſomething for our ſupper.—We found that we had now got into a very different world from any thing we had yet ſeen. The country here is exceedingly barren, and to a conſiderable diſtance produces neither corn nor wine: But the fields are adorned with an infinite variety of flowers and of flowering ſhrubs, and the rocks are every where entirely covered with capers, which are juſt now fit for gathering. If we had had vinegar, we could ſoon have pickled hogſheads of them.

We found here, in the greateſt perfection, that beautiful ſhrub called the Palmeta, reſembling a ſmall palm-tree, with an elegant fine flower: But, to our great mortification, the ſeed is not yet ripe. We likewiſe found great quantities of a blue everlaſting flower, which I don't remember to have ſeen in Miller, or any of our botanical books. The ſtem riſes above a foot high, and is crowned with a large cluſter of ſmall blue flowers, the leaves of which are of a dry ſubſtance like the Elychryſum, or globe Amaranthus. Some of theſe are of a purple colour, but moſt of them blue. I have gathered a pretty large quantity for the ſpeculation of the botaniſts on our return.

We found a good ſwimming-place, which is always one of the firſt things we look out for, as this exerciſe conſtitutes one of the principal pleaſures of our expidition.

As ſoon as it was dark, we got on board our little

little boat, and rowed about 100 yards out to ſea, where we caſt anchor; our pilot aſſuring us that this was abſolutely neceſſary, as the people in this part of the country are little better than ſavages; and, were we to ſtay at land, might very poſſibly come down during the night, and rob and murder us.

He likewiſe told us, that the Turks had made frequent invaſions upon this point of the iſland, which, of all others lay moſt expoſed to their depredations; that lately three of their chebecks ran into a ſmall harbour a few miles from this, and carried off ſix merchant-ſhips; and that very often ſome of their light veſſels were ſeen hovering off the coaſt; and the only way to be in perfect ſecurity from thoſe two enemies by ſea and land, was to chuſe a place on the coaſt ſo deep, that the banditti by land could not wade into us; and at the ſame time ſo ſhallow, as to be equally inacceſſible to the banditti by ſea.

When we found ourſelves thus in ſecurity on both hands, we wrapt ourſelves up in our cloaks, and fell aſleep: however, we had but a very uncomfortable night; the wind roſe, and the motion of our little bark was exceedingly diſagreeable, and made us heartily ſick. As ſoon as day began to appear, we made them pull into ſhore; when we were immediately cured of our ſickneſs; and as the weather continues ſtill unfavourable, we have fallen upon a variety of amuſements to paſs the time.

We have been thrice in the water, which is warm and pleaſant; and in the intervals, I have

writ you this letter on the top of a large basket, in which we carry our sea-store. We have likewise gathered shells, pieces of coral, of spunge, and several beautiful kinds of sea-weed. The rocks here are all of sand and gravel run together, and become as hard as granite. There are many shells and other marine substances mixed in their composition, which renders them objects of curiosity in the eye of a naturalist.

This morning we made a kind of tent of a sail, drawn over the point of a rock, and fixed with an oar, by way of pole. Here we breakfasted most luxuriously on excellent tea and honey of Hybla.

I was interrupted in this part of my letter, by an officer from the fort of Capo Passero. He tells us, that we may give over all thoughts of getting farther for these six days.—What do you think is his reason?—I own I was in some pain till he mentioned it.—This wind set in exactly as the moon entered her second quarter, and it will certainly continue till she is full. There is a rascal for you!—If he be telling truth, I shall certainly study astrology. He likewise told us, that two galliots had been seen off the coast; and desired us to be upon our guard; but I own, the moon, together with other circumstances, has considerably weakened his evidence with me.

We have learned from his conversation, that the fort of Capo Passero is made use of as a place of exile for the delinquents in the army; of which number I have not the least doubt that he is one. He told us there were two

near relations of the Viceroy, that had lately been ſent there for miſdemeanors; that for his part, he belonged to a very agreeable garriſon; but as he loved retirement, he choſe to accompany them. However, his countenance told a very different ſtory; and ſaid, in ſtrong language, that he was a *tres mauvais ſujet*. Beſides, he is a ſtupid fellow, and has tired me. I could learn nothing from him.

It muſt be owned, this is an excellent place of exile for a young rake, who wants to ſhow away in the beau monde. It is not within many miles of any town or village; ſo that the gentleman may enjoy retirement in its utmoſt perfection.

We were ſurpriſed to find on this coaſt quantities of the true pumice-ſtone, which at firſt we ſuppoſed to have been brought by the ſea from Ætna, till we likewiſe diſcovered many large pieces of lava, which made us imagine there muſt have been ſome eruption of fire in this part of the iſland; yet I ſee no conical mountain, or any other indication of it.

If our officer's prognoſtications prove true, and we are detained here any longer, I ſhall examine the country to a much greater diſtance. The wind continues directly contrary; the ſea is very high in the canal of Malta, and our Sicilian ſervant is in a ſad trepidation.—But I ſee Glover and Fullarton coming for their dinner; ſo I ſhall be obliged to give up the baſket.— This ſea-air gives one a monſtrous appetite; and, it is with grief I mention it, we are already brought to ſhort allowance:—Only one

cold fowl amongſt three of us; all three pretty ſharp ſet, I aſſure you.—Thoſe infamous raſcals to loſe our turtle!—They have ſpied a fiſhing boat, and are hailing her as loud as they can roar—but alas! ſhe is too far off to hear them.—They have juſt fired a gun to bring her to, and happily ſhe obeys the ſignal, ſo there is ſtill hopes; otherwiſe we ſhall ſoon be reduced to bread and water. Our tea and ſugar, too are juſt upon a cloſe, which is the cruelleſt article of all; but we have plenty of good bread and Hybla honey; ſo we are in no danger of ſtarving.

We have likewiſe made an admirable and a very comfortable diſpoſition for our night's lodging. The Sparonaro is ſo very narrow, that it is impoſſible for us to lie all in it: beſides, we are eat up with vermin, and have nothing but the hard boards to lie on: All theſe conſiderations, added to the curſed ſwinging of the boat, and the horrid ſickneſs it occaſions, have determined us rather to truſt ourſelves to the mercy of the banditti than to lie another night at ſea; Beſides, we have made the happieſt diſcovery in the world; a great quantity of fine, ſoft, dry ſea-weed; lying under the ſhelter of a rock, and ſeems intended by providence for our bed: Over this we are going to ſtretch a ſail, and expect to ſleep moſt luxuriouſly; but to prevent all danger from a ſurpriſe, we have agreed to ſtand centry by turns, with Fullarton's double barrelled gun, well primed and loaded for the reception of the enemy; at the firſt diſcharge of which, and not before, the whole guard is to

turn

turn out, with all the remaining part of our artillery and ſmall arms; and as our ſituation is a very advantageous one, I think we ſhall be able to make a ſtout defence.

As we are ſix in number, three maſters and three ſervants, the duty, you ſee, will be but trifling; and five of us will always ſleep in ſecurity. Our guard to be ſure, might have been ſtronger; but our Sparonaro men have abſolutely refuſed to be of the party: having much more confidence in their own element; however, they have promiſed, in caſe of an attack, immediately to come to our aſſiſtance. I think the diſpoſition is far from being a bad one, and we are not a little vain of our generalſhip.

The fiſhing-boat is now arrived, and they have bought ſome excellent little fiſhes, which are already on the fire. Adieu. Theſe fellows are roaring for their cold fowl, and I can command the baſket no longer.

Ever yours.

LETTER XIV.

Malta, June 4th.

IN ſpite of appearances, and our officer's wiſe prognoſtications, the wind changed in the afternoon, and we got under ſail by ſix o'clock: We paſſed the Straits, and coaſted along till eight, when we landed to cook ſome macaroni we had purchaſed of our ſailors, and try if we could ſhoot ſomething for ſea-ſtore, as we have ſtill a long voyage before us.

We

We came to the ſide of a ſulphureous lake, the ſmell of which was ſo ſtrong, that we perceived it upwards of a mile diſtant. We found the water boiling up with violence in many places, though the heat at the banks of the lake is very inconſiderable. However, this, added to the pumice and lava we found near Capo Paſſero, tends greatly to confirm us in the opinion, that this part of the iſland, as well as about Ætna, has, in former ages, been ſubject to eruptions of fire.

I think it is more than probable, that this is the celebrated Camerina, which Æneas ſaw immediately after his paſſing Pachynus, (or Capo Paſſero) which, Virgil ſays, the Fates had decreed ſhould never be drained:

"Hinc altas cautes projectaque ſaxa Pachyni
"Radimus; et fatis nunquam conceſſa moveri
"Adparet Camarina procul."

Virgil had good reaſon to ſay ſo; for the level of the lake or marſh (it being ſomething betwixt the two) is at leaſt as low as that of the ſea, and conſequently never could be drained.

It is ſurrounded with a variety of fine evergreens and flowering ſhrubs, of which the palmeta, and the arbutus or ſtrawberry tree, are the moſt beautiful. We ſaw a great many wildfowl; but what ſurpriſed me, in ſo unfrequented a place, they were ſo ſhy, that there was no getting near them: There was one kind, in particular, that attracted our attention; it was of the ſize and form of a grey plover, and flew in the ſame manner; but had a tail of a great length, which

ſeemed

ſeemed to be compoſed only of two ſmall flexible feathers, that made a very uncommon appearance in the air. After uſing all our art to ſhoot one of them, we were obliged to give up the attempt.

Here we killed a ſmall black ſnake, which I think, anſwers the deſcription I have ſeen of the aſp. We diſſected out its tongue, the end of which appears ſharp like a ſting, and I ſuppoſe is one, as it darted out with violence againſt our ſticks, when we preſented them to it. Now as all animals, when attacked, make uſe of thoſe weapons that Nature has armed them with for their defence, it appeared evident to us, (ſuppoſing this rule a juſt one) that this animal was conſcious of a power of hurting in its tongue; and we have been more fully convinced of it from diſſection. The ſting appears conſiderably larger than that of a bee. We found a little bag at the other end of the tongue, and probably, if if we had had a microſcope, ſhould have found the tongue perforated. This ſnake has no teeth; but very hard gums. I have taken care to preſerve the tongue for your inſpection.

As I think it has always been ſuppoſed, that ſerpents hurt only with their teeth, I thought this might be worthy of your notice. It is true, that the darting out of the tongue is a trick of the whole ſerpent tribe; but this animal ſeemed to do it with peculiar ferocity and to ſtrike it with violence againſt our ſticks. It was this that put us upon the examination.

I don't recollect that this ſingularity is mentioned in any book of natural hiſtory, but poſſibly

fibly I may be miftaken; nor indeed do I remember either to have feen or heard of any animal armed in this manner:—Unlefs you will fuppofe me to adopt the fentiments of poor Mr S——, who, ever fince his marriage alledges, that the tongues of many females, are formed after this fingular manner: and remarks one peculiarity, that the fting feldom or never appears till after matrimony.—He is very learned on this fubject, and thinks it may poffibly have proceeded from their original connection with the ferpent. Let this be as it may, I fincerely hope that you and I fhall never have fuch good reafon for adopting that opinion.

A little after nine we embarked. The night was delightful; but the wind had died away about fun-fet, and we were obliged to ply our oars to get into the canal of Malta. The coaft of Sicily began to recede; and in a fhort time, we found ourfelves in the ocean. There was a profound filence except the noife of the waves breaking on the diftant fhore, which only ferved to render it more folemn. It was a dead calm, and the moon fhone bright on the waters. The waves from the late ftorm, were ftill high; but fmooth and even, and followed one another with a flow and equal pace. The fcene had naturally funk us into meditation; we had remained near an hour without fpeaking a word when our failors began their midnight hymn to the Virgin. The mufic was fimple, folemn, and melancholy, and in perfect harmony with the fcene, and with all our feelings. They beat exact time with their oars, and obferved the harmony

mony and the cadence with the utmoſt preciſion. We liſtened with infinite pleaſure to this melancholy concert, and felt the vanity of operas and oratorios. There is often a ſolemnity and a pathetic in the modulation of theſe ſimple productions, that cauſes a much ſtronger effect, than the compoſition of the greateſt maſters, aſſiſted by all the boaſted rules of counter-point.

At laſt they ſung us aſleep, and we awoke forty miles diſtant from Sicily. We were now on the main ocean, and ſaw no land but mount Ætna; which is the perpetual polar ſtar of theſe ſeas. We had a fine breeze, and about two o'clock we diſcovered the iſland of Malta; and in leſs than three hours more, we reached the city of Valletta. The approach of the iſland is very fine, although the ſhore is rather low and rocky. It is every where made inacceſſible to an enemy, by an infinite number of fortifications. The rock, in many places, has been ſloped into the form of a glacis, with ſtrong parapets and intrenchments running behind it.

The entry into the port is very narrow, and is commanded by a ſtrong caſtle on either ſide. We were hailed from each of theſe, and obliged to give a ſtrict account of ourſelves; and on our arrival at the ſide of the key, we were viſited by an officer of the health-office, and obliged to give oath with regard to the circumſtances of our voyage.—He behaved in the civileſt manner, and immediately ſent us Mr Rutter, the Engliſh conſul, for whom we had letters of recommendation.

On getting on ſhore, we found ourſelves in a new

a new world.—The ſtreets crowded with well dreſſed people, who have all the appearance of health and affluence; whereas at Syracuſe, there was ſcarce a creature to be ſeen; and even thoſe few had the appearance of diſeaſe and wretchedneſs.—Mr Rutter immediately conducted us to an inn, which had more the appearance of a palace. We have had an excellent ſupper, and good Burgundy; and as this is the king's birth-day, we have almoſt got tipſey to his health. We are now going into clean, comfortable beds, in expectation of the ſweeteſt ſlumbers.—Think of the luxury of this, after being five long days without throwing off our cloaths.—Good night. I would not loſe a moment of it for the world.—People may ſay what they pleaſe, but there is no enjoyment in living in perpetual eaſe and affluence, and the true luxury is only to be attained by undergoing a few hardſhips.—But this is no time to philoſophiſe. So adieu.

LETTER XV.

Malta, June 5th.

OUR banker, M. Poüſilach, was here before we were up, inviting us to dine with him at his country-houſe, from whence we are juſt now returned. He gave us a noble entertainment, ſerved on plate, with an elegant deſert, and a great variety of wines.

After dinner we went to viſit the principal villas

villas of the iſland; particularly thoſe of the grand maſter, and the general of the gallies, which lie contiguous to each other. Theſe are nothing great or magnificent; but they are admirably contrived for a hot climate, where, of all things, ſhade is the moſt deſireable. The orange groves are indeed very fine, and the fruit they bear are ſuperior to any thing you have ſeen in Spain or Portugal.

The aſpect of the country is far from being pleaſing. the whole iſland is a great rock of very white free-ſtone, and the ſoil that covers this rock, in moſt places, is not more than five or ſix inches deep; yet, what is ſingular, we found their crop in general was exceedingly abundant. They account for it from the copious dews that fall during the ſpring and ſummer-months; and pretend likewiſe, that there is a moiſture in the rock below the ſoil, that is of great advantage to the corn and cotton, keeping its roots perpetually moiſt and cool; without which ſingular quality, they ſay, they could have no crops at all, the heat of the ſun is ſo exceedingly violent.

Their barley harveſt has been over ſome time ago; and they are juſt now finiſhing that of the wheat. The whole iſland produces corn only ſufficient to ſupport its inhabitants for five months, or little more; but the crop they moſt depend upon is the cotton. They began ſowing it about three weeks ago, and it will be finiſhed in a week more. The time of reaping it is in the month of October and beginning of November.

They pretend that the cotton produced from this plant, which is ſown and reaped in four months, is of a much ſuperior quality to that of the cotton-tree. I compared them, but I cannot ſay I found it ſo; this is indeed the fineſt; but that of the cotton-tree is by much the ſtrongeſt texture. The plant riſes to the height of a foot and a half, and is covered with a number of nuts or pods full of cotton: Theſe, when ripe, they are at great pains to cut off every morning before ſun-riſe; for the heat of the ſun immediately turns the cotton yellow; which, indeed, we ſaw from thoſe pods they ſave for ſeed.

They manufacture their cotton into a great variety of ſtuffs. Their ſtockings are exceedingly fine. Some of them, they aſſured us, had been ſold for ten ſequins a pair. Their coverlits and blankets are eſteemed all over Europe. Of theſe the principle manufactures are eſtabliſhed in the little iſland of Gozzo, where the people are ſaid to be more induſtrious than thoſe of Malta, as they are more excluded from the world, and have fewer inducements to idleneſs. Here the ſugar cane is ſtill cultivated with ſucceſs, though not in any conſiderable quantity.

The Malteſe oranges certainly deſerve the character they have of being the fineſt in the world. The ſeaſon continues for upwards of ſeven months; from November till the middle of June; during which time, thoſe beautiful trees are always covered with abundance of this delicious fruit. Many of them are of the red kind, much ſuperior, in my opinion, to the others, which are rather too luſcious. They are produced,

duced, I am told, from the common orange bud, engrafted on the pomegranate ſtock. The juice of this fruit is red as blood, and of a fine flavour. The greateſt part of their crop is ſent in preſents to the different courts of Europe, and to the relations of the chevaliers. It was not without a good deal of difficulty that we procured a few cheſts for our friends at Naples.

The induſtry of the Malteſe in cultivating their little iſland is inconceivable. There is not an inch of ground loſt in any part of it; and where there was not ſoil enough, they have brought over ſhips and boats loaded with it from Sicily, where there is plenty and to ſpare. The whole iſland is full of incloſures of free-ſtone, which gives the country a very uncouth and a very barren aſpect; and in ſummer, reflects ſuch a light and heat, that it is exceedingly diſagreeable and offenſive to the eyes. The incloſures are very ſmall and irregular, according to the inclination of the ground. This, they ſay, they are obliged to obſerve, notwithſtanding the deformity it occaſions; otherwiſe the floods, to which they are ſubject, would ſoon carry off their ſoil.

The iſland is covered over with country houſes and villages, beſides ſeven cities, for ſo they term them; but there are only two, the Valetta and the Citta Vecchia, that by any means deſerve that appellation. Every little village has a noble church, elegantly finiſhed and adorned with ſtatues of marble, rich tapeſtry, and a large quantity of ſilver plate. They are by much the handſomeſt country churches I have ever ſeen.

 But

But I am interrupted in my writing, by the beginning (I am told) of a very fine ſhow. If it be ſo, I ſhall give you ſome account of it by and by.

Eleven at night. The ſhow is now finiſhed, and has afforded us great entertainment. It was the departure of a Malteſe ſquadron to aſſiſt the French againſt the Bey of Tunis, who, it ſeems, has fallen under the diſpleaſure of the grand monarque, becauſe he refuſed to deliver up without ranſom, the Corſican ſlaves that were taken before the French were in poſſeſſion of that iſland. The ſquadron conſiſted of three gallies; the largeſt with nine hundred men, each of the others with ſeven hundred; three galliots, and ſeveral *ſcampavias*, ſo called from their exceeding ſwiftneſs. Theſe immenſe bodies were all worked by oars, and moved with great regularity. The admiral went firſt, and the reſt in order, according to their dignity. The ſea was crowded with boats, and the ramparts and fortifications were filled with the company. The port reſounded on all ſides with the diſcharge of heavy artillery, which was anſwered by the gallies and galliots as they left the harbour. As the echo is here uncommonly great, it produced a very noble effect.

There were about thirty knights in each galley, making ſignals all the way to their miſtreſſes, who were weeping for their departure upon the baſtions: for theſe gentlemen pay almoſt as little regard to their vows of chaſtity, as the prieſts and confeſſors do. After viewing the ſhow from the ramparts, we took a boat and followed the ſquadron.

ſquadron for ſome time, and did not return till long after ſun-ſet.

We have been admiring the wonderful ſtrength of this place, both by nature and art. —It is certainly the happieſt ſituation that can be imagined. The city ſtands upon a peninſula, betwixt two of the fineſt ports in the world, which are defended by almoſt impregnable fortifications. That on the ſouth-eaſt ſide of the city is the largeſt. It runs about two miles into the heart of the iſland, and is ſo very deep, and ſurrounded by ſuch high grounds and fortifications, that they aſſured us, the largeſt ſhips of war might ride here in the moſt ſtormy weather, almoſt without a cable.

This beautiful baſon is divided into five diſtinct harbours, all equally ſafe, and each capable of containing an immenſe number of ſhipping. The mouth of the harbour is ſcarcely a quarter of a mile broad, and is commanded on each ſide by batteries that would tear the ſtrongeſt ſhip to pieces before ſhe could enter. Beſides this, it is fronted by a quadruple battery, one above the other, the largeſt of which is a *fleur d'eau*, or on a level with the water. Theſe are mounted with about 80 of their heavieſt artillery; ſo that this harbour, I think may really be conſidered as impregnable; and indeed the Turks have ever found it ſo, and I believe ever will.

The harbour on the north ſide of the city, although they only uſe it for fiſhing, and as a place of quarantine, would, in any other part of the world, be conſidered as ineſtimable. It

 is

is likewiſe defended by very ſtrong works; and in the center of the baſon there is an iſland on which they have built a caſtle and a lazaret.

The fortifications of Malta are indeed a moſt ſtupendous work. All the boaſted catacombs of Rome and Naples are a trifle to the immenſe excavations that have been made in this little iſland. The ditches, of a vaſt ſize, are all cut out of the ſolid rock. Theſe extend for a great many miles; and raiſe our aſtoniſhment to think that ſo ſmall a ſtate has ever been able to make them.

One ſide of the iſland is ſo completely fortified by nature, that there was nothing left for art. The rock is of a great height, and abſolutely perpendicular from the ſea for ſeveral miles. It is very ſingular, that on this ſide there are ſtill the veſtiges of ſeveral ancient roads, with the tracks of carriages worn deep in the rocks: Theſe roads are now terminated by the precipice, with the ſea beneath; and ſhew to a demonſtration, that this iſland has in former ages been of a much larger ſize than it is at preſent; but the convulſion that occaſioned its diminution is probably much beyond the reach of any hiſtory or tradition. It has often been obſerved, notwithſtanding the very great diſtance of mount Ætna, that this iſland has generally been more or leſs affected by its eruptions, and they think it probable, that on ſome of thoſe occaſions a part of it may have been ſhaken into the ſea.

We have now an opportunity of obſerving that one half of mount Ætna is clearly diſcovered

vered from Malta. They reckon the diſtance near 200 Italian miles. And the people here aſſure us, that in the great eruptions of that mountain, their whole iſland is illuminated; and from the reflection in the water, there appears a great track of fire in the ſea all the way from Malta to Sicily. The thundring of the mountain is likewiſe diſtinctly heard.—Good night.—I am fatigued with this day's expedition, and ſhall finiſh my letter to-morrow.

June 6th. As the city of Valetta is built upon a hill, none of the ſtreets except the key are level. They are all paved with white free-ſtone, which not only creates a great duſt, but from its colour is likewiſe ſo offenſive to the eyes, that moſt of people here are remarkably weak-ſighted. The principle buildings are the palace of the grand maſter, the infirmary, the arſenal, the inns or hotels of the Seven Tongues, and the great church of St John. The palace is a noble though a plain ſtructure, and the grand maſter (who ſtudies conveniency more than magnificence) is more comfortably and commodiouſly lodged than any prince in Europe, the king of Sardinia perhaps only excepted. The great ſtair is the eaſieſt and the beſt I ever ſaw.

St John's is a magnificent church. The pavement, in particular, is reckoned the richeſt in the world. It is entirely compoſed of ſepulchral monuments of the fineſt marbles, porphyry, lapis lazuli, and a variety of other valuable ſtones admirably joined together, and at an incredible expence; repreſenting in a kind of Moſaic,

ſaic, the arms, inſignia, &c. of the perſons whoſe names they are intended to commemorate. In the magnificence of theſe monuments, the heirs of the grand maſters and commanders have long vied with each other.

We went this day to ſee the celebration of their church ſervice. It ſeems to be more overcharged with parade and ceremony than what I have ever obſerved even in any other catholic country. The number of genuflections before the altar, the kiſſing of the prior's hand, the holding up of his robes by the ſubaltern prieſts, the ceremony of throwing incenſe upon all the knights of the great croſs, and neglecting the poorer knights, with many other articles, appeared to us highly ridiculous; and moſt eſſentially different indeed from that purity and ſimplicity of worſhip that conſtitutes the very eſſence of true chriſtianity; and of which the great pattern they pretend to copy, ſet ſo very noble an example.

This day (the 6th of June) is held as a thankſgiving for their deliverance from a terrible conſpiracy that was formed about twenty-one years ago, by the Turkiſh ſlaves; at one ſtroke, to put an end to the whole order of Malta. All the fountains of the place were to be poiſoned; and every ſlave had taken a ſolemn oath to put his maſter to death.

It was diſcovered by a Jew, who kept a coffee-houſe. He underſtood the Turkiſh language, and overheard ſome diſcourſe that he thought ſuſpicious. He went immediately and informed the grand maſter. The ſuſpected perſons

ſons were inſtantly ſeized and put to the torture, and ſoon confeſſed the whole plot. The executions were ſhocking. One hundred and twenty-five were put to death by various torments. Some were burned alive, ſome were broken on the wheel, and ſome were torn to pieces by the four gallies rowing different ways, and each bringing off its limb. Since that time, the ſlaves have been much more ſtrictly watched, and have leſs liberty than formerly. Adieu. I ſhall write you again before we leave Malta.

Yours, &c.

LETTER XVI.

Malta, June 7th.

THIS day we made an expedition through the iſland in coaches drawn by one mule each; the only kind of vehicle the place affords. Our conductors could ſpeak nothing but Arabic, which is ſtill the language of the common people of Malta; ſo that you may believe we did not reap much benefit from their converſation. We went firſt to the ancient city of Melita, which is near the center of the iſland, and commands a view of the whole: and in clear weather, they pretend, of part of Barbary, and of Sicily. The city is ſtrongly fortified, and is governed by an officer called the Hahem. He received us very politely, and ſhewed us the old palace, which is not indeed much worth the ſeeing.

The

The cathedral is a very fine church; and although of an exceeding large ſize, is at preſent entirely hung with crimſon damaſk richly laced with gold.

The catacombs, not far from the city, are a great work. They are ſaid to extend for fifteen miles under ground; however, this you are obliged to take on the credit of your guides, as it would rather be riſking too much to put it to the trial. Many people, they aſſure us, have been loſt in advancing too far in them; the prodigious number of branches making it next to impoſſible to find the way out again.

From this we went to ſee the Boſquetta, where the grand maſter has his country palace; by the accounts we had of it at Valetta, we expected to find a foreſt ſtored with deer and every kind of game, as they talked much of the great hunts that were made every year in theſe woods. —We were not a little ſurpriſed to find only a few ſcattered trees, and about half a dozen deer; but as this is the only thing like a wood in the iſland, it is eſteemed a very great curioſity. The palace is as little worth ſeeing as the foreſt; though indeed the proſpect from the top of it is very fine. The furniture is three or four hundred years old, and in the moſt Gothic taſte that can be imagined: But indeed the grand maſter ſeldom or never reſides here.

The great ſource of water that ſupplies the city of Valetta, takes its riſe near to this place; and there is an aqueduct compoſed of ſome thouſand arches, that conveys it from thence to the city. The whole of this immenſe work

was finiſhed at the private expence of one of the grand maſters.

Not far from the old city there is a ſmall church, dedicated to St Paul; and juſt by the church, a miraculous ſtatue of the ſaint with a viper on his hand; ſuppoſed to be placed on the very ſpot on which the houſe ſtood where he was received after his ſhipwreck on this iſland, and where he ſhook the viper off his hand into the fire without being hurt by it: At which time the Malteſe aſſure us the ſaint curſed all the venomous animals of the iſland, and baniſhed them for ever; juſt as St Patrick treated thoſe of his favourite iſle. Whether this be the cauſe of it or not, we ſhall leave to divines to determine, (though if it had, I think St Luke would have mentioned it in the Acts of the Apoſtles) but the fact is certain, that there are no venomous animals in Malta. They aſſured us that vipers had been brought from Sicily, and died almoſt immediately on their arrival.

Adjoining to the church there is the celebrated grotto in which the ſaint was impriſoned. It is looked upon with the utmoſt reverence and veneration; and if the ſtories they tell of it be true, it is well entitled to it all. It is exceedingly damp, and produces (I believe by a kind of petrifaction from the water) a whitiſh kind of ſtone, which they aſſure us, when reduced to powder, is a ſovereign remedy in many diſeaſes, and ſaves the lives of thouſands every year. There is not a houſe in the iſland that is not provided with it: And they tell us there are many boxes of it ſent annually not only to

Sicily

Sicily and Italy, but likewiſe to the Levant and the Eaſt-Indies; and (what is conſidered as a daily ſtanding miracle) notwithſtanding this perpetual conſumption, it has never been exhauſted, nor even ſenſibly diminiſhed; the ſaint always taking care to ſupply them with a freſh quantity the day following.

You may be ſure we did not fail to ſtuff our pockets with this wonderful ſtone; I ſuſpected they would have prevented us, as I did not ſuppoſe the ſaint would have worked for heretics; however, neither he nor the prieſts had any objection, and we gave them a few Pauls* more for their civility. I taſted ſome of it, and believe it is a very harmleſs thing. It taſtes like exceeding bad Magneſia, and I believe has pretty much the ſame effects. They give about a tea-ſpoonful of it to children in the ſmall-pox and in fevers. It produces a copious ſweat about half an hour after, and, they ſay, never fails to be of ſervice. It is likewiſe eſteemed a certain remedy againſt the bite of all venomous animals. There is a very fine ſtatue of St Paul in the middle of this grotto, to which they aſcribe great powers.

We were delighted on our way back to the city, with the beauty of the ſetting-ſun, much ſuperior, I think, to what I have ever obſerved it in Italy. The whole of the eaſtern parts of the heavens, for half an hour after ſun-ſet, was of a fine deep purple, and made a beautiful appearance: This the Malteſe tell us is generally the

* A ſmall ſilver coin.

the case, every evening at this season of the year.

I forgot to say any thing of our presentation to the grand master, for which I ask pardon both of you and him.—His name is Pinto, and of a Portuguese family. He has now been at the head of this singular little state for upwards of thirty years. He received us with great politeness, and was highly pleased to find that some of us had been in Portugal. He mentioned the intimate commercial connections that had so long subsisted betwixt our nations, and expressed his desire of being of service to us, and of rendering our stay in his island as agreeable as possible. He is a clear-headed, sensible, little old man; which, at so advanced a period of life, is very uncommon. Although he is considerably upwards of ninety, he retains all the faculties of his mind in perfection. He has no minister, but manages every thing himself; and has immediate information of the most minute occurrences. He walks up and down stairs, and even to church without assistance; and has the appearance as if he would still live for many years. His houshold attendance and court are all very princely; and as grand master of Malta, he is more absolute, and possesses more power than most sovereign princes. His titles are Serene Highness and Eminence; and as he has the disposal of all lucrative offices, he makes of his councils what he pleases; besides, in all the councils that compose the jurisdiction of this little nation, he himself, presides, and has two votes. Since he was chosen grand master, he

has already given away 126 commanderies, ſome of them worth upwards of 2000l. a year; beſides priories and other offices of profit.—He has the diſpoſal of twenty-one commanderies and one priory every five years; and as there always are a number of expectants, he is very much courted.

He is choſen by a committee of twenty-one; which committee is nominated by the ſeven nations, three out of each nation. The election muſt be over within three days after the death of the former grand maſter; and during theſe three days, there is ſcarce a ſoul that ſleeps at Malta: All is cabal and intrigue; and moſt of the knights are maſked, to prevent their particular attachments and connections from being known: the moment the election is over, every thing returns again to its former channel.

The land force of Malta is equal to the number of men in the iſland fit to bear arms. They have about 500 regulars belonging to the ſhips of war; and 150 compoſe the guard of the prince. The two iſlands of Malta and Gozzo contain about 150,000 inhabitants. The men are exceedingly robuſt and hardy. I have ſeen them row from ten to twelve hours without intermiſſion, and without even appearing to be fatigued.

Their ſea force conſiſts of four gallies, three galliots, four ſhips of ſixty guns, and a frigate of thirty-ſix, beſides a number of the quick-ſailing little veſſels called Scampavias, literally Run-a-ways. Their ſhips, gallies, and fortifications, are not only ſupplied with excellent ar-

tillery;

tillery, but they have likewiſe invented a kind of ordnance of their own, unknown to all the world beſides. For we found to our no ſmall amazement, that the rocks were not only cut into fortifications but likewiſe into artillery to defend theſe fortifications; being hollowed out in many places into the form of immenſe mortars. The charge is ſaid to be about a barrel of gun-powder, over which they place a large piece of wood, made exactly to fit the mouth of the chamber. On this they heap a great quantitity of cannon balls, ſhells, or other deadly materials: and when an enemy's ſhip approaches the harbour, they fire the whole into the air; and they pretend it produces a very great effect, making a ſhower for two or three hundred yards round that would ſink any veſſel.

Notwithſtanding the ſuppoſed bigotry of the Malteſe, the ſpirit of toleration is ſo ſtrong, that a moſque has lately been built for their ſworn enemies the Turks. Here, the poor ſlaves are allowed to enjoy their religion in peace. It happened lately that ſome idle boys diſturbed them during their ſervice; they were immediately ſent to priſon, and ſeverely puniſhed. The police indeed is much better regulated than in the neighbouring countries, and aſſaſſinations and robberies are very uncommon; the laſt of which crimes the grand maſter puniſhes with the utmoſt ſeverity. But he is ſaid, perhaps in compliance with the prejudice of his nation, to be much more relax with regard to the firſt.

Perhaps Malta is the only country in the world where duelling is permitted by law.—As their

whole eſtabliſhment is originally founded on the wild and romantic principles of chivalry, they have ever found it too inconſiſtent with thoſe principles to aboliſh duelling; but they have laid it under ſuch reſtrictions as greatly to leſſen its danger. Theſe are curious enough.—The duelliſts are obliged to decide their quarrel in one particular ſtreet of the city; and if they preſume to fight any where elſe, they are liable to the rigour of the law. But what is not leſs ſingular and much more in their favour, they are obliged under the moſt ſevere penalties to put up their ſword, when ordered ſo to do, by a *woman*, a *prieſt*, or a *knight*.

Under theſe limitations, in the midſt of a great city, one would imagine it almoſt impoſſible that a duel could ever end in blood; ho ever, this is not the caſe:—A croſs is alwa painted on the wall oppoſite to the ſpot wher a knight has been killed, in commemoration of his fall.—We counted about twenty of theſe croſſes.

About three months ago, two knights had a diſpute at a billiard table.—One of them, after giving a great deal of abuſive language, added a blow; but to the aſtoniſhment of all Malta (in whoſe annals there is not a ſimilar inſtance) after ſo great a provocation, he abſolutely refuſed to fight his antagoniſt.—The challenge was repeated, and he had time to reflect on the conſequences, but ſtill he refuſed to enter the liſts.—He was condemned to make *amende honorable* in the great church of St John for forty five days ſucceſſively; then to be confined in a dungeon

dungeon without light for five years, after which he is to remain a prifoner in the caftle for life. The unfortunate young man who received the blow is likewife in difgrace, as he had not an opportunity of wiping it out in the blood of his adverfary.

This has been looked upon as a very fingular affair, and is ftill one of the principal topics of converfation. The firft part of the fentence has already been executed, and the poor wretch is now in his dungeon. Nor is it thought, that any abatement will be made in what remains.

If the legiflature in other countries punifhed with equal rigour thofe that do fight, as it does in this thofe that do not; I believe we fhould foon have an end of duelling: But I fhould imagine the punifhment for fighting ought never to be a capital one, (but fomething ignominious;) and the punifhment for not fighting fhould always be fo, or at leaft fome fevere corporal punifhment; for ignominy will have as little effect on the perfon who will fubmit to the appellation of coward, as the fear of death on one who makes it his glory to defpife it.

The Maltefe ftill talk with horror of a ftorm that happened here on the 29th of October 1757, which, as it was of a very fingular nature, I fhall tranflate you fome account of it from a little book they have given me, written on that fubject.

About three quarters of an hour after midnight, there appeared to the fouth-weft of the city a great black cloud, which, as it approached, changed its colour, till at laft it became

like a flame of fire mixed with black ſmoke. A dreadful noiſe was heard on its approach, that alarmed the whole city. It paſſed over part of the port, and came firſt upon an Engliſh ſhip, which in an inſtant was torn to pieces, and nothing left but the hulk: part of the maſts, ſails, and cordage were carried along with the cloud to a conſiderable diſtance. The ſmall boats and fellouques that fell in its way were all broken to pieces, and ſunk. The noiſe increaſed and became more frightful. A ſentinel, terrified at its approach, run into his box: Both he and it were lifted up and carried into the ſea, where he periſhed. It then traverſed a conſiderable part of the city, and laid in ruins almoſt every thing that ſtood in its way. Several houſes were laid level with the ground, and it did not leave one ſteeple in its paſſage. The bells of ſome of them, together with the ſpires, were carried to a conſiderable diſtance. The roofs of the churches were demoliſhed and beat down, which, if it had happened in the day-time, muſt have had dreadful conſequences, as all the world would immediately have run to the churches.

It went off at the north-eaſt point of the city; and demoliſhing the light-houſe, is ſaid to have mounted up in the air, with a frightful noiſe; and paſſed over the ſea to Sicily, where it tore up ſome trees, and did other damage, but nothing conſiderable; as its fury had been moſtly ſpent upon Malta. The number of killed and wounded amounted to near 200; and the loſs of ſhipping, houſes, and churches, was very conſiderable.

Several

Several treatiſes have been written to account for this ſingular hurricane, but I have found nothing at all ſatisfactory. The ſentiments of the people are conciſe and poſitive. They declare, with one voice, that it was a legion of devils let looſe to puniſh them for their ſins. There are a thouſand people in Malta that will take their oath they ſaw them within the cloud, all as black as pitch, and breathing out fire and brimſtone. They add, that if there had not been a few godly people amongſt them, their whole city would certainly have been involved in one univerſal deſtruction.

The horſe races of Malta are of a very uncommon kind. They are performed without either ſaddle, bridle, whip, or ſpur; and yet the horſes are ſaid to run full ſpeed, and to afford a great deal of diverſion. They are accuſtomed to the ground for ſome weeks before; and although it is entirely over rock and pavement, there are very ſeldom any accidents. They have races of aſſes and mules performed in the ſame manner, four times every year. The rider is only furniſhed with a machine like a ſhoemaker's awl, to prick on his courſer if he is lazy.

As Malta is an epitome of all Europe, and an aſſemblage of the younger brothers, who are commonly the beſt of its firſt families, it is probably one of the beſt academies for politeneſs in this part of the globe; beſides where every one is entitled by law as well as cuſtom, to demand ſatisfaction for the leaſt breach of it, people are under the neceſſity of being very exact and circumſpect

cumſpect, both with regard to their words and actions.

All the knights and commanders have much the appearance of gentlemen, and men of the world. We met with no character in extreme. The ridicules and prejudices of every paticular nation, are by degrees ſoftened and wore off, by the familiar intercourſe and colliſion with each other. It is curious to obſerve the effect it produces upon the various people that compoſe this little medley. The French ſkip, the German ſtrut, and the Spaniſh ſtalk, are all mingled together in ſuch ſmall proportions, that none of them are ſtriking; yet every one of theſe nations ſtill retain ſomething of their original characteriſtic: It is only the exuberance of it that is wore off; and it is ſtill eaſy to diſtinguiſh the inhabitants of the ſouth and north ſide of the Pyrenees, as well as thoſe of the eaſt and weſt ſide of the Rhine; for though the Pariſian has, in a great meaſure, loſt his aſſuming air, the Spaniard his taciturnity and ſolemnity, the German his formality and his pride; yet ſtill you ſee the German, the Frenchman, and the Spaniard: It is only the caricature, that formerly made them ridiculous, that has diſappeared.

This inſtitution, which is a ſtrange compound of the military and eccleſiaſtic, has now ſubſiſted for near ſeven hundred years; and though, I believe, one of the firſt-born, has long ſurvived every other child of chivalry. It poſſeſſes great riches in moſt of the catholic countries of Europe; and did ſo in England too, before the time

time of Henry VIII, but that capricious tyrant did not chooſe that any inſtitution, however ancient or reſpected, ſhould remain in his dominions, that had any doubt of his ſupremacy and infallibility; he therefore ſeized on all their poſſeſſions, at the ſame time that he enriched himſelf by the plunder of the church. It was in vain for them to plead that they were rather a military than an eccleſiaſtic order, and by their valour had been of great ſervice to Europe, in their wars againſt the infidels: It was not agreeable to his ſyſtem ever to hear a reaſon for any thing; and no perſon could poſſibly be right, that was capable of ſuppoſing that the king could be wrong.

Malta, as well as Sicily, was long under the tyranny of the Saracens; from which they were both delivered about the middle of the eleventh century, by the valour of the Normans: After which time the fate of Malta commonly depended on that of Sicily, till the emperor Charles V, about the year 1530, gave it, together with the iſland of Gozzo, to the knights of St John of Jeruſalem, who at that time had loſt the iſland of Rhodes. In teſtimony of this conceſſion, the grand maſter is ſtill obliged every year, to ſend a falcon to the king of Sicily, or his viceroy; and on every new fucceſſion, to ſwear allegiance and to receive from the hands of the Sicilian monarch, the inveſtiture of theſe two iſlands.

Ever ſince our arrival here, the weather has been perfectly clear and ſerene, without a cloud in the ſky; and for ſome time after ſun-ſet, the heavens exhibit a moſt beautiful appearance, which

which I don't recollect to have observed any where else. The eastern part of the hemisphere appears of a rich deep purple, and the western is the true yellow glow of Claud Lorrain, that you used to admire so much. The weather, however, is not intolerably hot; the thermometer stands commonly betwixt 75 and 76. Adieu. We are now preparing for a long voyage, and it is not easy to say from whence I shall write you next.

Ever yours.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.